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EUTYCHUS
AND HIS RELATIONS



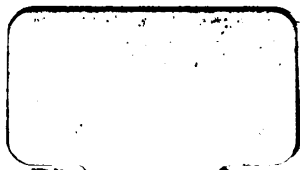
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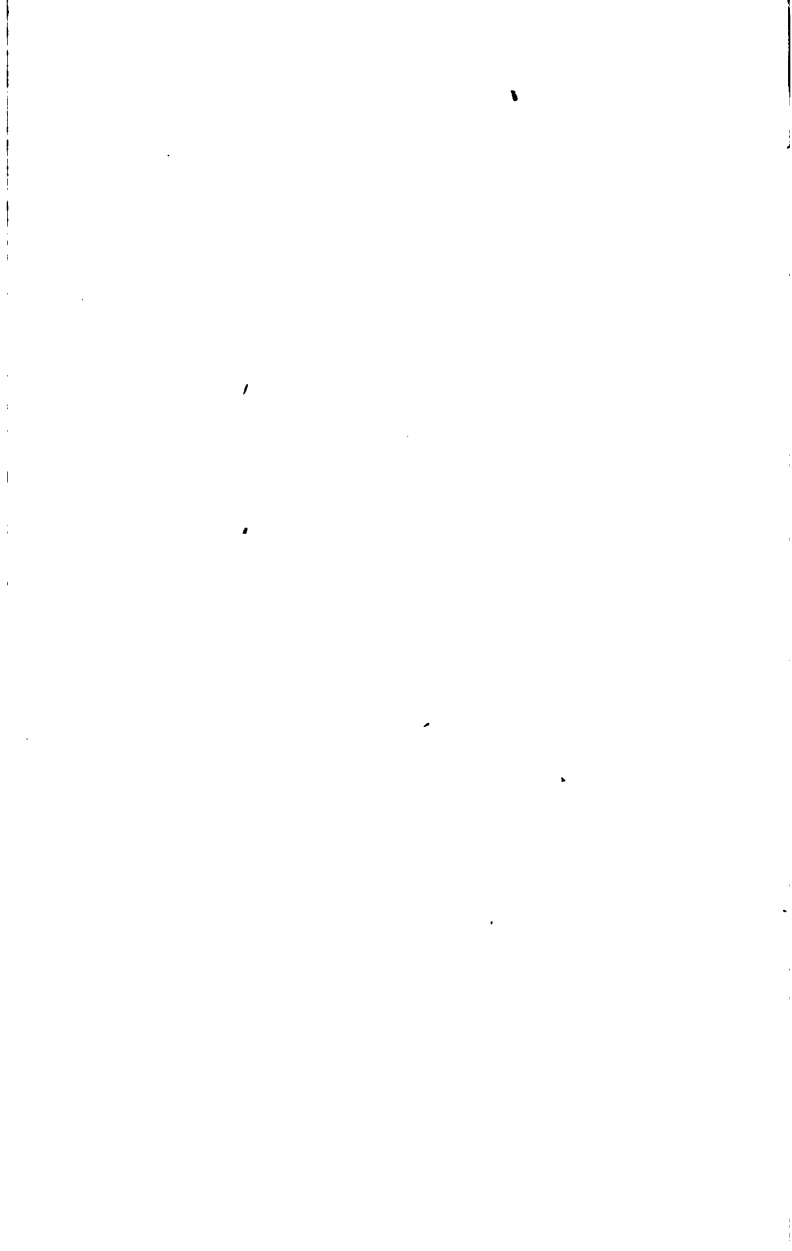


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EUTYCHUS

AND HIS RELATIONS

Pulpit and Pew Papers

BY

BROOKE HERFORD

BOSTON

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

1906

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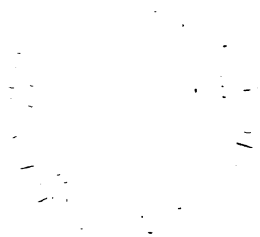
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PREFACE.

THE 'Pulpit and Pew' Papers in this little book were written and published anonymously, during the years 1860 and 1861 by the late Dr. Brooke Herford in the early years of his ministry.

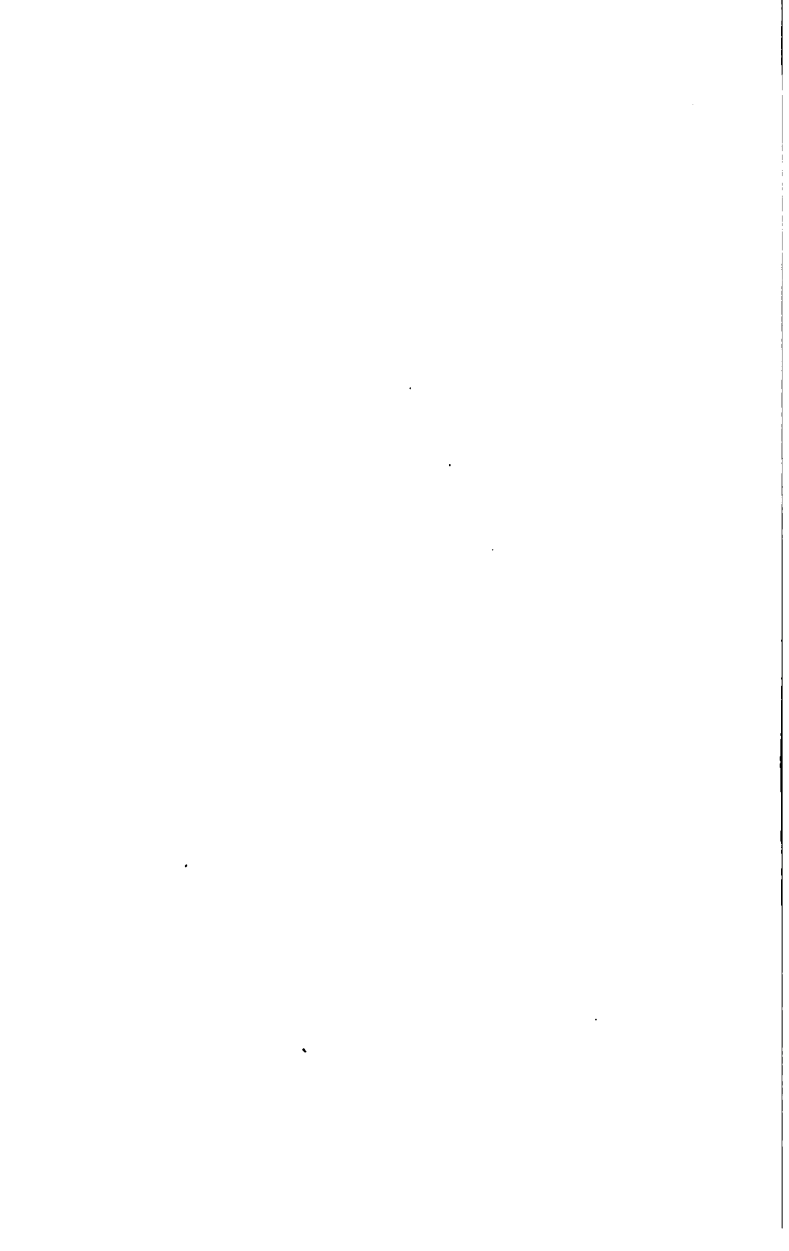
In the Biographical sketch of Dr. Herford by the Rev. P. H. Wicksteed, M.A., which forms an Introduction to the volume of sermons, 'Anchors of the Soul,' it is stated that the 'Eutychus' papers 'made some little stir and roused considerable curiosity in their day, and will repay perusal still. There is a strange persistence in the minor weaknesses of humanity.'

London, February, 1905.



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I.

A 'LAY' VIEW OF SLEEPING IN CHURCH.

FOR my part I pity Eutychus. He has been held up as a warning to sleepy congregations, and his falling down set forth as a judgment, by grave old divines of the precise Puritanical school, who could not appreciate the difficulty of keeping the attention fixed through long sermons, especially such sermons as their own. The clerical mind has a curious faculty of exaggerating small ecclesiastical offences, and while on most subjects entertaining very enlarged views and charitable feelings, has no sympathy with the little difficulties of the laity in these matters. I wish, therefore, to present a *lay* view of the subject.

It has a strange attraction for me. I have read those few verses in the twentieth chapter of Acts, again and again, and I love to touch

A 'LAY' VIEW OF

and retouch the quaint little picture of the early church which they have left upon my mind. I seem to sit among the eager people grouped together in that little upper-room at Troas. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, and the foreboding is strong upon his spirit that he shall never see them again. We do not know what he said,—Luke had taken ship and gone on before to Assos, so he was not there to tell us—but there are no more touching words in all the Acts than his farewell to the elders of Ephesus, given at the end of the same chapter; and it would be in much the same strain that he would speak to these poor folk at Troas, that last Sabbath-night of his brief stay. Have you never seen a crowded little preaching-room, away in some back street or country place,—a small, low room over a couple of cottages, with many lights stuck here and there against the walls, and homely long-headed weavers and poor women eagerly crowding to hear, and children sleeping heavily in the close hot air, and many faces peering in at the door. I think of such sights which I have seen many a time among the Methodists, when I was a young man, as often as I read of

SLEEPING IN CHURCH

Eutychus. Poor young man, who has not seen him sitting, 'fallen in a deep sleep.' I dare say he was as fond of Paul as any of them, and listened lovingly at first. But 'Paul was long preaching,' and 'continued his speech until midnight'; and so at last, what with the heat, and the lights, and some of the apostle's longer points about the Judaizing teachers and the dead works of the law, gradually the words began to melt into a pleasant dreamy flow of sound, and his head bowed down in that 'deep sleep.'

What a break in the midst of his touching words, when at last poor Eutychus over-balanced as he sat on the window-ledge, and suddenly his feet flew up and he disappeared with a heavy fall! How the people would rush out with lights and crowd about him, till Paul came down and knelt bending over him, with such a deep, longing prayer that he might be spared, and soon could say, to the great joy of the wondering friends, 'Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him.'

What a lesson for poor Eutychus! I don't think he would go to sleep in chapel again for a long time, and when he did, he would take care *not to sit in a window!*

A 'LAY' VIEW OF

It would have been well, indeed, if he had impressed more care on that head upon his relations and descendants. History affords some remarkable illustrations of the hereditary descent of family peculiarities. It is said that slave-hunters could detect the slightest taint of 'colour' by looking at the thumb-nail of suspected persons who to all appearance were of pure European blood. So indications, more or less marked, of descent from Eutychus have been from time to time discovered in some modern families. And it were to be wished that their respectable ancestor had cautioned his descendants to be careful to choose places where, if the family-failing should overtake them, they will neither injure themselves nor inconvenience others, nor cause scandal to the minds of weak brethren.

Of *themselves*, perhaps, they are sufficiently careful. They do not sit in windows,—perhaps because these are inconveniently built now-a-days; but how often, in such little preaching-rooms as I have mentioned, have I seen a man, evidently lineally descended from Eutychus, after vainly trying to sit upright in the middle of a narrow form

SLEEPING IN CHURCH

without a back, yielding to deep sleep and falling clumsily over a neighbour, who without ever abstracting his own reverential gaze from the preacher, holds up the sleeper with good-natured forbearance.

Some people go to sleep in church on system. This I cannot justify. I am myself descended from Eutychus by a collateral branch on the mother's side, but I feel that the family-tendency ought to be resisted as far as possible, therefore I cannot countenance deliberate indulgence in it. Still there was a certain dignity about the old man whom the venerable Dr. Williams, tutor of a well-known theological academy, had among his congregation. The Doctor remarked that his old friend, as regularly as Sunday came, went to sleep under him in a very steady and systematic way; and he did not object to this till his friends remarked that whenever the Doctor was absent, and one of the students preached, the old man sat bolt upright, never missing a word. Dr. Williams gently remonstrated. 'Well, Doctor,' said the old man, 'it's just here,—when I sees *you* i'th pulpit I know it's all right, and that the doctrines 'll come out just like Scriptur,

A 'LAY' VIEW OF

an' I turns me round and goes to sleep easy. But when they lads is agate I feels it my duty to keep an eye on 'em—for you never know what they young 'uns is up to ! ' There was a certain loyalty to his old pastor which no one could resist in that answer, albeit it reminds one of the complaint made by a rural congregation, whose habits, formed for many years under a mild divine of the old school, were disturbed by an energetic young preacher who succeeded him. ' Why, when th'oud man were alive, we all went to sleep of a Sunday afternoon, an' got a nice rest ready for milkin' ; but as for this new-fangled chap, drat 'un ! what wi' talking loud and bobbin' his arms about, I can never tak' my eyes off 'un, and haven't had a comfortable nap sin' last fair.'

What a curious sensation it is, that of gradually falling off to sleep ! I take it for granted you try to keep awake, perhaps you are in a strange pew, or you know the preacher has his eye upon you, or there is nothing to lean against, and you would be likely to start up in waking. How you screw up your mind, and look fixedly at the pulpit, with a desperate effort to make head or tail

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of the words which seem to dribble into your mind and dribble out again. You feel your eyelid begin to fall, just a little. No! you won't; and you shake your head and try again. And you succeed; yes, you feel you are taking in every word, there is no doubt about it; and soon, while you are assuring yourself of this, the voice has changed, the subject has run off at a tangent from that profound argument about the Epistle to the Romans, and has changed into an interesting description of a gorilla; and yet it seems all right and connected; you have no longer any feeling of being sleepy, and—and suddenly you start and find you must have been asleep, for the preacher is still hammering out his little explanation, and your neighbour is gazing reproachfully at you, with that self-righteous look which is so repulsive a characteristic of wakeful persons.

Therefore, now and then, on a hot day, bear with the sleepers: nay, even pity them, and remember all the pangs and qualms they suffer; but that is all. I cannot tolerate your regular sleepers,—your men who *will* sleep, and who look black and vicious when you, quite by accident, give them a gentle

A 'LAY' VIEW OF

nudge with your foot. The curate of Littleboro's plan was the way to serve people of that kind. He—I don't know which curate it was—found his people sleeping Sunday by Sunday. He tried every plan he could think of to make the services more interesting, but without success. So one hot summer's afternoon, just as the people roused themselves at the end of the sermon, he said very quietly, 'Well, my friends, that sermon doesn't seem to have interested you; I am very sorry for it; but there is a remedy for all things, and *I have another in my pocket* which you will perhaps like better!' and to the dismay of the people he proceeded to begin again, and preached another sermon steadily through to a more wakeful audience than he had seen for many a week!

There is one class of persons whom I always like to see asleep in church. I mean very little children. I think they grow up to like the place of worship better if they are allowed to go quietly off to sleep during the sermon. I like to take my little ones to chapel, and see the sense of reverence dawning on their young minds. When the psalms are sung, and during the prayers,

SLEEPING IN CHURCH

I would have them wakeful, for it is then that they insensibly catch something of the awe of the sacred presence, as they listen to those simple words, 'our Father,' and wonder who is spoken to. And I would have them attend as the Scriptures are read, for these words cannot too soon become familiar to their minds. But when the sermon comes—as they begin to be tired—I coax them to lie down on the seat, and I take off my little daughter's hat and lay her head gently on my knee, while my lad leans up against my shoulder, and they sink off into such sweet, calm, innocent slumbers as it does my heart good to see. I seem to listen better than myself; and as I watch the little heaving breast and stroke the golden curls, I think of Christ and the children, and I feel how 'of such is the kingdom of Heaven.' It makes me charitable to feel that little head resting there—charitable to all men and to all creeds, and hopeful too; and often, if the sermon be but a dull one, the little angel-face lying there so lovingly and trustingly, calls many a text to mind and preaches to me of hope and trust, and 'resting in the Lord.'

II.

SOME PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS COME LATE.

It is a curious faculty some people have of always coming late to chapel. Anyone can be late occasionally with a little effort, but there are some persons who seem gifted with a heaven-born unpunctuality, and who invariably rise superior to little arrangements as to time. I know them! My pew is fortunately placed just at a point where, as I sit in the side corner, I can take in the whole chapel with my left eye, and I can see a good deal of what goes on in a quiet way. Bless you, do you think I don't see when young Moppett is down from London and comes to chapel on a Sunday evening with Miss Spoker, and they sit together in the high pew under the gallery, holding hands all the service! Our parson can't see it; poor man, he was remarking

PEOPLE WHO COME LATE

the other day that 'young Mr. Moppett really seemed taking quite a religious turn,' and that he thought he would have a good influence on the Spokers, who *entre nous* are rather flighty Christians.

Yes, and do you think I don't see young Sparks telegraphing slyly to his friend up in the gallery? Oh I can assure you, I see a good deal, and among others I have my eye on the late-comers.

Those are not the regular late-comers, who rush in hot and breathless while the introductory chant is being sung: those are punctual people who have got accidentally delayed, and who have hurried and done their best to be in time. These are the people who look down half-ashamed as they come in, and huddle into their pews as if forty generations were looking down upon them from the gallery, and have their books open in a moment and begin reading desperately as if trying to overtake the parson, and make the responses with expiatory eagerness. One has some comfort in these people coming late, you know they are ashamed of it, and that for six weeks to come they will be in before even the voluntary

SOME PEOPLE WHO

has begun! But your regular late-comers do things in a very different way. They only begin to drop in when the service is fairly under weigh: during the Old Testament there is quite a running fire of them, and they keep coming in, little knots of twos and ones all through the chanting and the lessons, with one incorrigible straggler in the hymn before the sermon.

And they aren't put out or in any way ashamed. Not they. There is a sober dignity about your regular late-comers which contrasts most favourably with the uncomfortable self-consciousness of people who only occasionally come late, and who have never thoroughly endeavoured to make a practice of it. There is Griggs the lawyer now; his regular time is during the first lesson, if anything, a little towards the end of it. He doesn't hurry in, but walks calmly and sedately up the aisle, looking blandly at the minister and the people around, and stands with his pew-door open while his wife and two daughters and the governess sail in, in all the majestic panoply of the period. That man was born for a noble station! Watch him as he sits down and

ALWAYS COME LATE

looks calmly about him as he gathers up his Prayer-book and slowly settles the heavy double eye-glass on his nose—by-the-way, what dignity a double eye-glass gives to the face—and gradually bends his thoughts to the service. I wonder what would be the effect on Griggs if our parson were to stop in the lesson some Sunday, and after waiting till our friend and his family had settled themselves down, were to say as did a very bland minister of my acquaintance under similar circumstances, with a courtly inclination of the head towards the delinquent's pew: 'The lesson we are reading is in the twentieth chapter of Acts.' I do not think, however, it would make any impression, except that Griggs would bottle up his wrath till he got home and then indulge himself in a few strong remarks on the nature of parsons in general, and perhaps would not come at all for six weeks afterwards. There is a certain moral courage in the Griggs family, because they have to walk up the whole length of the centre aisle to the corner pew in the transept, in face of the congregation; but I cannot accord the same meed of commendation to the two young Walkers, be-

SOME PEOPLE WHO

cause they take a mean advantage of their pew being next to the door, and sneak in sometimes as late as the prayer for the 'Queen,' or the 'High Court of Parliament now sitting.' So quiet, they are! They know every movement of the latch, and how to hold the door a little back upon its hinges to prevent it creaking, and even those in the next pew can hardly hear a sound,—but it is not right. Besides, they have no excuse. They have a holiday any Saturday afternoon, and have not to keep hard at it till twelve o'clock at night (and later still sometimes I am afraid) like little Biggs the grocer, who may well be excused for coming in a little late with those four small children. Poor Biggs! You can read his history as he comes in! He said to his wife last night that 'raylly he would be in time to-morrow, for he was fair ashamed—goin' in when the readin' was on, ah' makin' sich a racket.' But he overslept himself again, and ever since breakfast his poor careworn wife, who never comes herself except in the evening, has been getting those children up in wonderful Sunday frocks and tippets, and hats of awful splendour, and the little man has had

ALWAYS COME LATE

to wait, bearing his impatience meekly, for he dare not distract that anxious mother's attention ; and as for getting himself ready, why he couldn't do it for a thousand pounds. *He* couldn't get into that uncomfortable collar or pin it into stable equilibrium, and as to arranging that blue check satin tie, it's out of the question. No, he had to wait till the children were finished, and his turn came, and so he got late again, and came in hot and flurried, tripping up an umbrella in the gallery, and knocking a hymn book on to the floor in his perturbation—and it will be so to the end of the chapter.

But, why should the Robinsons always be ten minutes after time ? I know theirs is a well-ordered household ; I know their mother is a busy managing woman ; I know the father has the greatest respect for the minister, and is a sincere Christian ; and yet, I do not think I ever saw them in their pew in proper time, these ten years. I can only account for it in one way. The fact is, they live *only two hundred yards from the chapel !* That is a fatal difficulty. I never expect to find anyone punctual at worship, who lives nearer than half-a-mile.

SOME PEOPLE WHO

But why, in the name of all the punctualities, should our minister's wife always come in just after the service is begun? She is never much late, and she is, I need not say, a most estimable woman; but, just about the middle or end of the first chant, she comes in with those two big boys of hers, and, I can just catch her husband looking at her with a *very* slight expression as who should say, 'Dear me, there's my wife late again!' And she is a strong-minded woman, too. So that, standing in a sort of semi-official position, and naturally expected to be an 'example to believers,' I do think she might be more careful.

I have sometimes pondered on the best remedy for this unpunctual tendency. Some ministers make a dead pause and look black, but I think this is apt to make everybody uncomfortable, *except* the persons aimed at, who are generally far too flurried to be conscious of anything except of a general concentration of many eyes upon them, and who will look anywhere except at the pulpit. Ministers have sometimes been known to pause and address the late-comers with considerable effect. If any minister be inclined

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to try this plan, he must be careful to avoid falling into the error which was committed by the late Dr. Green, of Glasgow. This respectable pastor of the Free Kirk, a rather pompous divine, and a strict disciplinarian, was called to a new church, just in the first blush of his rising fame, and entered upon his new settlement with no previous personal acquaintance with the people. Determined to take a firm stand against all irregularities at the opening service, he looked with severe reprobation on every one who entered after time. At last two gentlemen came in together, very late indeed, when the worthy Doctor, unable to stand it any longer, paused in the service, and administered a personal remonstrance (they do those kind of things in Scotland), with a few other general remarks bearing on the subject of punctuality at worship. To his great surprise, a general titter passed through the congregation. But, what must have been the Doctor's feelings when the chapel-keeper informed him, as he helped him off with the gown, in the vestry, that the two friends whom he had selected for his shocking example, were two of the deacons whose turn it had been, according to the

SOME PEOPLE WHO

good old custom of the north, to stand with the boxes at the church-entrance, till the last comers should have contributed their mite !

But, why should all this lateness be ? People can be in time for other things ; why not for this best thing of all ? I know that Griggs will say things quite unworthy of that double eye-glass if his dinner be ten minutes late. Those young Walkers will be in half-an-hour before the time at a concert. Biggs might as well shut up his shop at ten on Saturday, and get a good night's sleep, and have some pleasure in his day of rest, as keep it open for a few straggling customers, not because it pays him, but, just because the grocer opposite, who cares nothing for Sunday, will not join in an early-closing movement ! And, as for the Robinsons, they never are late anywhere except for chapel. I do think such people cannot know the happiness there is in being in one's place at chapel a few minutes *before* the time. I like to walk quietly down from my house upon the Sunday, enjoying the peaceful Sunday-look of all things. I like to have time to pause upon the bridge, and gaze for a moment on the pretty gleam of country,

ALWAYS COME LATE

which one sees between the houses, just before we enter the town. I like to watch the little children as they troop along in such prim consciousness of an unusual responsibility for their clean Sunday dresses. Bless them, it will do them no harm. There is a civilising influence in Sunday clothes ; and all those decent men and women—smart too, some of them, to the scandal of my wife—they are the better for being dressed so nicely ; and I like to see them, and I feel that they are all a part of the happiness of the day. And then, as I enter the chapel-yard, I like to stand a moment in the sunshine and feel a swelling of the heart in gratitude for the day that is so restful and so lovely in its calm. Then, entering with my little girl holding by my hand, it is a blessed thing to sit back quietly in my corner of the pew, and have my own little moment of worship ere the organ begins. Perhaps I may not put my head into my hat, or kneel ; yet, as I sit there quietly, I sometimes think that, in the quiet of that five minutes' space, I feel a deeper spirit of worship than in all the set prayers and singing of the service afterwards.

III.

PRAISING GOD BY PROXY.

WANDERING lately, during a fortnight's holiday from business, through the pleasant rural scenery of Cheshire, I came on the Sunday to a homely little chapel in the heart of the country. A quaint brick edifice, built some hundred and fifty years ago by the piety of a few neighbouring Presbyterian yeomen, so plain as almost to be mistaken for a barn, were it not for the little belfry which asserts the dignity of a chapel, there is something attractive in its very simplicity—so in keeping with the old-fashioned dwellings of the neighbouring hamlet, and with the small rustic congregation of farmers and labouring men who gather from all the country round upon the Sunday afternoon. Entering at the beckoning of the old gray-haired sexton, I took my seat among some of the labouring people by the door, instead

PRAISING GOD BY PROXY

of following him to the great pew in the corner, which, with its mildewed baize and solitary state, was far less inviting than the plain oak boards where the common people worshipped. I am not going to describe all the service : it is the psalmody which always attracts my notice more than anything else, and it was the psalmody which fixed that day in my memory. In a gallery at the end of the chapel sat some twenty Sunday scholars, and just before them a young girl and an old man with a great venerable fiddle. The fiddle is a cherished institution in our country chapels. Woe to that minister who ventures to criticise its performances, or to suggest the adoption of some more congenial instrument ! I have known more than one minister whose whole relations to his people were embittered by the indiscreet suggestion to introduce a harmonium.

It was the old story : the hymn was given out, and after striking the chord, the old fiddler and the girl struck up together. It was a tune I had never heard—a fearful tune, full of strange twists and repetitions—a tune that seemed as if it would never come to an end. By the tattered music-book, towards

PRAISING GOD BY PROXY

which the old man's massive spectacles were turned, it must have been a tune that all the congregation had known from childhood, but no one joined in. The Sunday scholars had no hymn books, and were chiefly occupied in pinching one another. The congregation stood mostly with open mouths, but it was only their habitual state, not a note proceeded from any of them. The only variation in that dreary and monotonous performance was in the second hymn. Here the tune was more complicated still, and the girl, with her weak, thin, treble voice, went wrong; whereupon the old man, who evidently had as much as he could do to keep right without the distracting influence of some one close by him going wrong, broke in upon the performance with a loud 'stage aside,' which was well heard all over the place—'Sit thee down!' and when the poor girl made one more fruitless attempt to get into the tune—'Sit thee *down*, I say; I conno' fiddle to thee!'

Walking away afterwards through the little hamlet, I passed the Methodist Chapel, and heard proceeding from its open windows a full chorus of voices singing a good old-fashioned hymn. It was a pleasant contrast

PRAISING GOD BY PROXY

to hear the many voices together, for albeit they were rough and sung with country accent, they seemed to join in heartily.

Go with me to one of our chapels in a neighbouring city, a beautiful church rather, where everything is arranged to gratify the most fastidious taste, and no money is spared to bring all the higher influences of art to strengthen and elevate the emotions of the hour of worship. A great congregation of well-dressed, well-educated people gather here ; no open-mouthed rustics gazing with wondering admiration at an old fiddler spelling out his notes not always successfully, but people of whom many have cultivated musical tastes. One would expect to find here a people able to praise God together, singing with spirit as well as with understanding. But no ! They praise God by proxy. There is a magnificent organ, and some half-dozen professional singers, and these 'perform the psalmody !' It is often very beautiful, but no one joins, or only a few, and those often the least able to join in with effect. As a performance for an audience to listen to, it is quite correct and in good taste. As the praise and thanks-

PRAISING GOD BY PROXY

giving of a people meeting together to worship God, it is poor, tame, and spiritless. Fancy six voices in an organ-gallery piping out—

‘We’ll crowd thy gates with thankful songs.’

Those respectable Christians paying their hundred a year for these musical services would very likely be scandalised at the comparison, but I think theirs is really a more ridiculous spectacle than the old villager with his ‘Sit thee down, I conno’ fiddle to thee!’

Why is it that this lifelessness pervades our psalmody? There is no necessity for it. I went one evening a while since to a large Independent Chapel. There were perhaps fifteen hundred people present. There was a tolerably fine organ, but *not one singer*. The organ led off a good old psalm tune (the three that evening were ‘Fenwick,’ the ‘Old Hundredth,’ and ‘Sicilian Mariners’), and straightway there uprose such a strong, full swelling chorus of praise as made the walls ring again, and went echoing forth into all the neighbourhood round, warming the heart of many a one besides those who were gathered at the service itself. Now I am sure our congregations are not less able to

PRAISING GOD BY PROXY

join in these old familiar hymn tunes, and I often ask myself why it is that the psalmody in our chapels is so very seldom really congregational.

There is one advantage in it perhaps. Being done *for* the congregation instead of *by* them, it furnishes an outlet for an amazing amount of small grumbling. If I were asked to name the two things which, somehow or other, cause more grumbling, and bickering, and dissatisfaction, than anything else among our respectable chapel-goers, I should name the pews and the psalmody. It is astonishing how touchy people are about their pews: but that is a subject which must be deferred to another occasion. It is the psalmody that we are concerned with at present.

When I first joined our chapel, the organ was played by an old man who had held it for more than twenty years. He had been reckoned a fine player in his youth, but fashions change in music as in other things, and a generation had arisen 'who knew not Joseph;' and Joseph being a positive and self-opinionated old man, who hated what he called 'new-fangled rubbish,' there was a chronic state of hostility between the organ

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gallery and the pews. The congregation grumbled and said they were tired of hearing the same old tunes for ever ; ‘ and as for his voluntaries, there was no feeling or sentiment in them ; they were nothing but a lot of rattling old flourishes, not fit for a place of worship.’ Joseph, on the other hand, declared the congregation did not know what music was ; and, moreover, ‘ didn’t know what they wanted.’ At last this state of things came to a natural end. Joseph got tired of being worried, and, declaring that he was getting too old to be tied to the organ twice every Sunday, resigned ; whereupon the congregation—as is always done in those cases—got up a testimonial, and expressed the liveliest regret at his retirement.

Our next venture—chosen after much heart-burning, for three different parties in the congregation had favourite candidates—was a very fine player indeed, a doctor of music, a man who shrugged his shoulders with a sublime contempt when the performances of old Joseph were alluded to ; who played only the very highest style of music, and had great ideas on the subject of altogether reforming our bare cold services. And

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certainly he did play well, in fact too well ; and what with chromatic passages, and new tunes, and improved ways of playing the old tunes, he very soon had a hornet's-nest about his ears. Old Joseph was avenged, and now his good old tunes and the simple melodies on which he used to play grandiloquent variations, were extolled, and poor Dr. B.'s life was made miserable by a constant succession of contradictory, and, as he considered, ignorant suggestions. To add to his troubles, there was war in his own camp. The leading Treble declared she couldn't sing to his playing ; the Bass—a man of stentorian power—persisted in singing on in his own way. The organist blamed the singers, and they made a party in the congregation ; and at last, one Sunday, they wouldn't sing at all. So the upshot of it was that, the organist resigning in a pet, and the singers being dismissed for insubordination, we were left to begin anew, with all the world before us.

By what evil genius I was induced to step in at this conjuncture I know not. A good deal was said against paid choirs, and it was proposed to try and get up a volunteer choir among our young people. I was known

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to take some interest in music, and having always held my peace and never taken sides in musical matters, was inconclusively supposed by both parties to have a good deal of taste, and was urgently requested to undertake the general management of the choir. I consented, and for three years, during which I have held that post, I think I have hardly known what peace of mind is.

Two leading ideas possessed my mind ; the first was to make our psalmody as simple as possible ; the second to make it congregational. Propounded in theory at one of our social meetings, these two principles were vehemently applauded, but no sooner did I attempt practically to carry them out than my troubles began. ‘ Really, my dear fellow,’ my friend S. would say to me on a Sunday morning after service, ‘ your choir do give us such humdrum tunes, they are enough to make one miserable for the week ; do let us have something more lively.’ On which I try to explain the principle of it, but S. only rejoins, ‘ well, I don’t profess to know anything about music, you know, but I know what I like.’ Next Sunday I get them to give us a couple of light, simple airs,

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that I had picked up in an American psalmody and that a child could catch at once. What is the result ? Why, my wife is pestered by half-a-dozen pious ladies the following week, all expressing how shocked they were at those dreadful things the choir gave last Sunday—‘ they were more fit for a theatre ; my dear, do, pray, speak to your husband, because we know he has to do with all that.’ Then L. comes to me, wants a great deal more music in the service ; chants and anthems. ‘ Music you know, Mr. Eutychus, is a great help to devotion ;’ and he tells me how his soul has been subdued on several occasions by his visits to Catholic churches, and thinks our bald services are the cause why our chapels are so thinly attended. In course of time we introduced a chant, and even went so far as an anthem ; when lo ! next week, old Mr. Biffin, whose family have sat in the chapel for a century, sends a letter to the secretary protesting against the introduction of such Popish practices, and threatening to give up his subscription, and withdraw from the chapel.

But I could bear all this, if I had succeeded in my endeavour to make the singing con-

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gregational. I do not like the idea of our praising God by proxy. I see around me in the chapel, every Sunday, many people who understand something of music ; young ladies whose fathers have been paying I don't know how much a lesson to music masters for years past ; young men who can roll out a song in company in a good stout bass ; and yet they all stand up with their hymn books in their hands, and never so much as sing a note. 'Oh, Mr. Eutychus,' the young ladies say, when I speak to them about it, 'really we *can't* sing !' And then they tell me how one Sunday they did think they would try ; but when they began, it seemed as if nobody else was singing near them, and so they had been obliged to stop. We did indeed get a few of them to join the volunteer choir for a while, but it did not last long. Their parents objected to their coming out at night to the 'practice' in the winter—though, by the way, they were very constant in their attendance at parties and balls. Then jealousies arose. Miss B. said Miss C. 'put her out,' and Miss C. retorted that Miss B. systematically sung half a note flat. This, of course, ended in their both

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withdrawing. Our Tenor would trouble the whole choir by retarding on his closing notes so as to get a little solo at the end to himself ; and the Alto took offence at hearing that some one had likened his voice to a ' kitten-falsetto.' At last we were reduced to the Bass and two little boys, and the voluntary principle was pronounced a failure, and so we are at a loose end once more !

Good heavens ! what are we to do ?

IV.

PEWS.

WHEN our present handsome Gothic chapel was building, we used for about a year, to hold our meetings for worship in the neighbouring 'Masonic Hall.' There could not well be a stronger contrast than the circumstances in which we then found ourselves presented to the state in which we had previously subsisted. Our old chapel was a model of that peculiar architecture, or want of architecture, which was so dear to the souls of our Presbyterian forefathers. Those who have worshipped in it before it was destroyed by that unfortunate fire which everyone will recollect, can never forget its old brick walls blackened by time and smoke; its antiquated tablets, sacred to the memory of departed ministers; its deep cuttings among the pews, which stood for aisles; and most of all, the pews them

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selves. The separate system of worship was in full force there. It is indeed said, that the system now adopted in prison chapels for the complete isolation of the several convicts, was suggested by a chaplain, a pervert from our faith, who had gained the idea from an early familiarity with Presbyterian meeting-houses. He might well have gained it in our old chapel. Deep, dark, and lined with dingy baize, the pews well deserved the name of 'sleepy hollows,' which was given them among a transcendental party in the congregation who desired their removal. Who can adequately describe those high backs, which in our childhood seemed to bound the ecclesiastical horizon, and made general observation impossible, except during the hymns, when we were considerably put to stand on the seats. And those narrow seats, with cushions that always perversely sloped the wrong way, and off which we were only prevented from slipping by buttresses of big venerable buffets! Dear old pews! what games we children used to have in you on Sunday afternoons, when we were sent to chapel by ourselves, or with one not very staid domestic, what time Eutychus senior

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dozed at home in an arm-chair with his handkerchief over his face. What surprising architectural effects we used to produce with the hymn books and Bibles ! And what naps our elders used to have in those dark corners, while a quiet, pleasant stream of kind and scholarly exhortation seemed to flow from some invisible source, and find its way over the top down into the recesses of the pew.

Those times are gone. When the old chapel was destroyed, great was the discussion as to the style of architecture to be adopted in rebuilding it. The elders stood out stoutly for the good old style, and would have had the place merely restored, regarding the desire for Gothic as symptomatic of loose religious principles, and inevitably tending to scepticism on inspiration and miracles. But the neighbouring congregation at G—— had recently built a handsome church, which dazzled the minds of our people when they occasionally visited it, with its open roof, and stained windows, and gorgeous altar cloths, and at length the more artistic taste prevailed.

It was in the interval that, as I began by saying, we worshipped in the Masonic Hall.

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It seemed a curious thing, after the privacy of those dark old pews, to be sitting all together on benches, able to look at your neighbours, and to see everybody who was there. Some did not like it. Old Mr. Biffin, who for twenty years had never missed going to sleep in his old corner pew under the gallery, declared he could take no pleasure in the sermons now; and the elder Miss Spokers, who were the two first ladies married in the new chapel, protested that they did not like being so exposed; they thought 'privacy in worship enabled you to enter so much more deeply into the service,' but it was generally considered that their views had at least partial reference to more sublunary emotions.

The congregation, however, for the most part, liked the change very much. It brought them more together. Mr. S. and Mr. B., who had, purely through good breeding and not from any estrangement, ignored each other's existence for years, though worshippers in neighbouring pews, were led, by the fact of Mr. S.'s umbrella falling on Mr. B.'s feet, to slight interchange of greetings, which, increased by a little mutual accommo-

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dation in hymn-books, ripened into a warm friendship between the families. People who had sat down-stairs for a generation found out that there were many people regularly attending the same place, of whose existence, from the fact of their sitting in the gallery, they had been perfectly unaware. Sitting close together and there being only a very small chamber-organ, lent by one of the congregation, the people were actually betrayed into a heartiness of singing, which had been impossible when each person was singing in a deep wooden box, and which I am sorry to say has never been attained since. In short, there was more social feeling, more mingling of class with class, more of the kindly spirit of brotherhood evoked during that year than ever had been dreamed of. Our parson seemed to preach more home to us all than ever before. It was a new sensation when we all rose together for prayer, some kneeling down, and fathers and mothers holding their little children kindly by the hand as they prayed. It seemed more like real *worship*, and sometimes when the summer sun came shining in upon us sitting so together, I do believe a blessing came into our

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hearts, and we all felt, as we had never done before, what it was to be members of one church.

Perhaps it was the experience of these meetings in the Masonic Hall which suggested to a few of our people the idea of doing away with pews altogether in the new chapel. Certain it is that the idea was mooted, and a few took it up very warmly. It found, however, very little favour. It was, indeed, urged with some force that it was no innovation, but merely a returning to the old custom from which the church had never departed until the Reformation. But habit was too strong. Even the very people who had remarked on the greater sociability of our temporary arrangements, shuddered at the idea of being permanently without pews. 'What?' said Mrs. X., the leader of our congregational fashion, 'would you have me sit side by side with all the dirty ragged people out of the street?' 'How are we to do with our families, one sitting here and another there, never certain that we might not be dispersed all over the chapel,' said a fond parent whose family certainly used to produce a considerable effect by regularly

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trooping in all together in the middle of the second lesson. Mr. M. said it was 'levelling'; Mr. T. affirmed it was 'low, and radical, and all that sort of thing; sir! and really if this kind of thing goes on we shall all be obliged to go off to church!'

Of what use was it suggesting to Mrs. X. that the dirty ragged people were not in the habit of attending churches and chapels; and that if they could be induced to come it would soon result in their dirt and rags disappearing! In vain, also, to tell the anxious parent that the society of her children would easily be secured by their all coming in good time. The public sentiment was against it, and pews carried the day!

And yet I cannot help thinking it is a pity the plan of free and open seats was not tried. Certain it is that since we got into our new chapel the pews have caused more bickerings and jealousies than anything else, except the psalmody.

It is a curious question by what rules the pews in particular parts of our chapels acquire a certain conventional superiority. In one chapel the front pews just by the pulpit are coveted, and become the object of secret

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intrigues with the chapel-warden, whenever one of them falls vacant. In another chapel you will find those front pews given up to the waifs and strays of the congregation; poor old people, who sit there that they may be in nobody's way, and those groups of very little children, in charge of a staid matron of eight years old, who wander furtively in, if they can escape the apparitor, on Sunday evenings. In one chapel I know it is the gallery which is the 'respectable' position; and no one is looked upon as at all qualified for the select circles of the congregation who sits in what is contemptuously designated 'the pit'; while in many others the square pews down-stairs are a sort of 'west-end' for first-class sinners, and the galleries are occupied by certain inferior orders,—as a fashionable lady said to me confidentially, speaking of her own chapel, about which I was making some inquiries, with a view to this paper, 'the kind of people who go to tea parties and teach in the Sunday School, and make themselves useful, you know; very good people, very estimable indeed, and one is very glad that the minister makes himself at home among them; but not the sort

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of people, you know, that one could have anything to do with !’

In our chapel, by a curious and unaccountable vagary, it is the two transepts which respectability has marked out for its own. They are in no way superior to the other pews ; in fact, all our pews are alike, long and narrow, with backs reaching just below your shoulders against which the book-ledge projects a little uncomfortably. But, nevertheless, those pews in the transept have some peculiar charm that attracts the ambition of our people. When the Crocketts came down from London to settle in our city, it was expected that they would join the chapel, as they had always attended at Sussex Street when in town ; and they came a few times, and, indeed, inquiries were made for a pew in the transept, but none was vacant just then ; and very soon after they went to the Cathedral, Mr. Crockett alleging that the church is getting so liberal now that it is mere factiousness to stand aloof from it. As our people rise in the world—and they have a wonderful knack of rising—they gradually begin to set their minds on a pew in the transept, just as in the old chapel they did on a square pew.

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Sometimes a vacancy occurs. Then comes a contest—who is to have it? The F.s speak to the chapel-warden; they have long been thinking of changing, there is such a terrible draught where they sit. But the G.s have been at him already. ‘Mr. G. doesn’t like the gallery, and that pew would just suit him.’ And while they are settling which of them is to have it, it is discovered that another family have already removed their books and cushions in, and quietly taken possession by a private arrangement with the last occupants. Of course they had no right to do so; but they are *in*, and possession is nine points of the law. So henceforth these three families will be deadly polite to each other!

Joint occupancy is a fertile source of grievances. There are the Pawtons; they were very nice people in the chapel till the other half of their pew was taken by a respectable family who had left the Baptists to come amongst us. But the Pawtons were chemists, while the new family had only a provision shop, and the amalgamation was very difficult. I know the Pawtons well, and they used to tell me their

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little grievances. 'Actually, sir, that stout woman went and took my corner last Sunday week, and though I told her that there she would have the pillar between her and the preacher, which I don't mind myself, she said she should do very well!' Then, being converts, they would bring their friends with them, and filled their half of the pew quite full. Then troubles arose over the Prayer books, and Mr. Pawton's old pocket Bible was missing one Sunday, and the strangers were suspected of having lent it at the evening service to some people in another pew. Miss Pawton used to come to the Sunday School, but when the young man from the provision shop joined it, her mother found she couldn't spare her, and she soon broke off; but I know it was all from fear lest it might involve more intimacy than could be tolerated in their embittered state of feeling. At last the poor strangers were fairly driven off the field, and went back to the Baptists, declaring that 'they could do with the parson and the preaching, but as for the people, they were a nasty, proud, stuck-up lot, without a bit of real manners, and they couldn't do with it.'

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Of course it was very wrong and unjust to say so ; but that is the way these little personal discourtesies, which arise from this system of 'reserved seats,' get exaggerated.

When *will* people learn to show Christian kindness in small matters ?

V.

A COUNTRY TEA PARTY.

WE had our soirée last week. It was a great and fashionable occasion. We held it in the large hall of the Philosophical Institute, which is the crack assembly room of our city, and really when the tables were all set out and filled with guests it was a beautiful sight. Mrs. Eutychus had a tray at one of the bottom tables, and very excited she had been for some days previously, on the question whether she ought to take her silver teaspoons or only the common electro-plate. But the finest sight was at the top table. There were the vases of most splendid flowers ; there, the richest cake-baskets ; and there the two splendid footmen of old Mr. Biffin, who are not above making themselves useful at these little festivities, and who give an air of grandeur to the whole entertainment which is much valued by our people. After

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tea we had speeches : we had caught a live Sheriff, who was put in the chair, duly primed with a little address, which would have produced more effect if it had been audible beyond the fifth row of the people ; but it was something to see the impressive way in which he raised and lowered his hands, and when he paused and drank a little water in the temporary embarrassment of having run away from his nominative case, the clapping was enthusiastic and the general feeling highly exhilarating. Then came the usual variety of speeches. A flowery and imaginative speech from a minister with long hair, and a historical speech which enlarged on the glorious two thousand. Then there was the usual speech on 'civil and religious liberty,' which brought down the house, on 'slavery,' 'Garibaldi,' and the recent appointment of the sheriff, which was understood to be a death-blow to all the more intolerant features of 'church and state.' A converted Mandarin had been expected, who had recently produced much sensation at religious meetings, but, to the great disappointment, especially of the ladies, he did not appear. Besides all these, there were

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the usual number of speeches on nothing in particular, which seemed chiefly introduced for the purpose of preventing half-a-dozen neighbouring ministers from feeling slighted. By these cheerful amusements the evening passed quickly away, and at half-past ten the choir sang the dismissal hymn for us, and we broke up, not without gratitude that it was over.

Reflecting afterwards, as I sat in my easy-chair, on the nature of religious entertainments among civilised people, there came vividly to my recollection an evening I passed some years ago among some simple-hearted primitive people in one of the large manufacturing villages of Lancashire. They have a plain old-fashioned chapel, with deep galleries in which the congregation mostly sit, the body of the chapel being used as a Sunday School. They have no regular minister, at least they had not in those days, but the place of one was well supplied by a sturdy old man who will be remembered for generations to come, and whose plain homely words were far more thought of than the finer compositions of the 'College lads' who used at times to go over as supplies. They are

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not a fashionable congregation; there is not one among them who would set up for a gentleman, and I am afraid Mr. Biffin's footmen would look upon their annual festivities as very low, but I have always found them an earnest, warm-hearted, hospitable people, and I like now and then to go and spend a Sunday among them, and listen to their homely preaching and their strong hearty singing and the band that rivals for number and variety of instruments that to which David dedicates some of his Psalms.

It was a fine frosty winter evening, near the merry Christmas time, that I got out at the Bankside station to walk about a mile through rows of weavers' cottages, and now and then by some great factory, to the chapel. Long before I reached it I could see the long row of windows, through which the lights gleamed with a cheerful welcome out into the night. There was a merry sound of laughing and talking, with the clatter of crockery, as I entered the chapel-yard, and many a hearty shake of the hand greeted me as I passed along the narrow aisle to take off my coat and wrappers in the vestry, which, for the occasion, was

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consecrated to the miscellaneous purposes of stores and tea, cloaks and bonnets, and robing for the subsequent dramatic entertainments. Behind the door was a mighty tin can, full of boiling tea, with clamorous applicants standing about with urns. There, too, were tables, at which stood half-a-dozen bonny lasses, up to the elbows in cake and bread and butter. But what was this to the sight which awaited me when I went back into the chapel, in which—there being no schoolroom—the tea party was held! It was crowded—body, aisles, and gallery. Such groups of merry country people taking tea in the pews and in the open space beneath the gallery! Such a thick fog of steam arising from the tea and from the hot, ruddy faces of four hundred merry folks, and settling on the windows and trickling down the walls! Such cries for cream and sugar—and, ‘Now, Bill, art ’tee boun’ to be aw neet wi’ that bread an’ butter? Come, lad, we’re welly clammin.’

‘Here, Maister Eutychus, yo come and sit along wi’ us; and my Missus ull mak yo’ a cup of tea.’ And so I went and took my place in a deep, old-fashioned pew, where a merry family group were getting tea together.

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There was the father, a middle-aged man, an overlooker in one of the neighbouring mills—a staid, solid man of fifty. There was his ‘Missus,’ a comely dame, in a wonderful black satin dress, and a prize cap that was reserved for great occasions. There were two rosy girls with dimpled faces and smooth beautiful hair that you could have seen yourself in—regular Lancashire witches, who were up every morning of their lives by five o’clock, and off to the factory. There was also a shy young man in the corner, who never spoke, and seldom even *looked*, but whom, I was afterwards confidentially informed, was ‘keeping company along of our ‘Lizabeth.’ Many a Sunday had I passed with them in their plain but neat, hospitable, plentiful home, years before, when ‘Lizabeth was a coy little puss, who used to sit on my knee and play with my bunch of keys; and now they all gladly made a place for me, and I was plied with tea and cake, and bread and butter, till I could hardly sit, and still was pressed with hospitable assurances that I’d eaten nothing! So the tea passed off. When we had done we had to turn out for another set who stood about in the chapel-

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yard, or in the gallery—for there were over five hundred altogether—and, according to the custom of the place, they were to 'take tea at three times,' as they said.

But at last all were satisfied, the tea things were cleared away, the slops of tea wiped up, the orchestra had done their tuning and were ready for a start, and old Isaac —, their preacher, had got into the little pulpit, which was 'the chair' for the occasion.

Such a chorus they started with! 'Judge me, oh Lord'; five-and-twenty voices keeping splendid time, and singing as none but Lancashire folk can sing. And then the old chairman got up and made a short address, bidding them all 'welcome,' and saying a little about the state of their society during the year gone by. He was a homely speaker, not very regular in his pronouns, and very lax in regard to his 'h's,' but he spoke in such a kind and fatherly way, for he had been one of their preachers when the middle-aged men there, were little children, that 'the eye blessed him as it saw him'; and when he spoke of some who were with them no more, and reminded them that he could not expect to see many more such meetings,

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there were few eyes that did not glisten with a tear.

And now the intellectual entertainment of the evening began. The pews before the pulpit had been boarded over for the occasion, making a platform, and thither came up boys and girls of all sizes to 'say their pieces.' The old man in the pulpit acted as prompter as well as chairman, and as the little reciters came up one by one they handed the books, in which they had been frantically looking over their pieces to the last moment, over the edge of the pulpit, and then making a bow or a curtsy to the pulpit, and another to the expectant gallery full of friends, plunged into the subject. There were all sorts of pieces said in all sorts of ways. Up came a big lad with 'The Inchcape Bell,' which gave fine scope for that peculiar swinging recitative which so assists imperfect memories. Up came two demure-looking little lasses with the usual prose dialogue in which Betsy and Jane discuss the merits of going to school, and Betsy, who began 'Good afternoon, my dear Jane, I hope you are not thinking of going to the Sunday School this fine afternoon,' is converted by Jane's remonstrances, and

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ends by the most exemplary acknowledgment of error. But the finest sight was where a 'little wee toddlin' thing,' not above seven years old, dressed—to borrow an expression—within an inch of her life, was set upon a chair and, amid breathless silence, in a clear shrill little voice, of which every syllable could be heard by all, repeated a pretty little ballad about 'Dutiful Jim.' I shall never forget that prim little phenomenon, nor how she brought down the house when she finished, and with the same imperturbable gravity made another little curtsy and retired into private life.

But now a stir and bustle took place, the platform was cleared, and evidently something was about to take place. 'What are we going to have now?' I asked of my friends—we were sitting now in a front pew in the gallery—'Oh dunnot you know, they're going to act a play—its 'Joseph and his brethren!' This was evidently the crowning event of the evening. There was Joseph in a patchwork counterpane done up about him in the style well known to have been characteristic of Hebrew youth. There were his brethren who rated him for his pre-

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sumption, in endless blank verse. But how can I describe the thrilling effect when Joseph was let down by his remorseless relatives through an opening in the stage into the communion pew! And then the feast, when a deputation from the brothers—for the platform would not hold a table to accommodate more than four—sat down amid the imaginary gorgeousness of Pharaoh's palace to a sumptuous banquet of two plates of dry biscuits and a decanter of raspberry vinegar, while Joseph walked up and down in mental anguish, telling the audience how he was hardly able to restrain himself from making his kinship known.

But why criticise these humble pleasures. The actors did their best, and the audience listened with open mouths and ears, and every one was pleased, and so was I. Perhaps I have seen better acting; and the '*mise en scène*' was far from perfect. It seemed a strange thing, too, acting plays in a chapel. I could not help wondering what our respectable people would say—but I thought of the old miracle plays, and was reconciled when I saw how the simple story told upon the audience.

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I like that humble tea party. I like the heartiness of the people, and their old-fashioned hospitable ways.

And as I sit writing this it all seems to come before me as if it were but yesterday. I hear the old man's kindly tones that will speak no more on earth ; I hear the little reciter and the broad Lancashire of Joseph and his brethren ; I hear the last hymn and the few words of blessing ; I hear the merry voices of the people trooping out into the moonlight and shouting pleasantly to each other at the lane ends, as they part towards their various homes with happy thoughts and feelings to cheer them for a year to come.

VI.

A RATHER FASTIDIOUS CONGREGATION.

Mrs. EUTYCHUS and I have been having our yearly holiday. The last part of it she spent at the sea side with the children, while I have been visiting some relations of mine, two maiden ladies who live near London, at the pretty little country town of Wattleton-in-the-Marshes. Their connection with my family will at once be recalled by my readers when I mention that their name is Blaise—Euphemia and Jane Blaise—and that they are own neices to the late Mrs. Mary Blaise on whom Goldsmith wrote that beautiful epitaph in which he delicately alluded to our family peculiarity in the words—

‘She never slumbered in her pew
But when she shut her eyes.’

These two excellent ladies are leading

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people in the little congregation at Wattleton. Having lived there from childhood on a small property of their own, they know every man, woman, and child in the place; and though they are precluded by their sex from exercising, directly, the functions of trustees or members of committee in the chapel, they are not without considerable influence in congregational affairs. As most of the other members are recent accessions since the opening of the railways to the metropolis some years ago, families of retired Londoners, or men of business who prefer living out of town, my cousins have a sort of prescriptive precedence at clothing meetings, tea parties, and all such little congregational activities.

But it is as sources of intelligence that they are most remarkable. I must confess to liking a bit of quiet gossip myself,—not *scandal*, that is gossip run into uncharitableness, but a good long talk over everything that is going on,—and when I go down to Wattleton I am sure of having the latest intelligence about our ecclesiastical affairs. They can always tell me who is the real author of that article in the ‘Rational’ which the acute literary taste of metropolitan critics

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constantly—but erroneously—ascribes to ‘the polished and graceful style of the accomplished etc., etc.’ They know all about the real influences which led Mr. ——— to secede from the Church. They have always just had a letter from a friend belonging to that influential congregation that is vacant, and know how matters actually stand, and who is really likely to be chosen minister. And they know the occult causes which broke off the arrangements, understood by the public to have been completed, for Mr. Y. to take the pulpit at Hexham.

This time, however, the topics of our conversation chiefly arose out of the fact of their own chapel being without a minister. If I might venture to hint at such a thing, the congregation at Wattleton are a little undecided, and never seem to know their own mind. They have a tendency also to stone their prophets and afterwards build them sepulchres. I gather this from the fact that their old minister, who has been at rest these twenty years, and whose last days were embittered by a chronic state of congregational dissatisfaction, arising out of his old sermons, his dislike to visiting, and his humdrum ways,

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has since been canonised in their affectionate remembrance as an ideal preacher and pastor, and is constantly thrown at the heads of the rising generation. Since his demise they may be said never to have been settled. In those twenty years they have had six ministers, and they are now more unsettled than ever. To the original elements of what in the old times was a quiet little country congregation, have been added several fastidious London families, accustomed to the most refined religious exercises, and also a number of thinking artizans, with a strong tendency to scepticism, and a liking for rude and impetuous rhetoric, who were attracted to the chapel during the brief ministry of Mr. Buncombe, afterwards the celebrated chartist orator. It is true that these latter have not much influence in the congregation, but they form a convenient peg on which to hang a grievance: and more than one minister has been complained of, either for too much or too little regard for them, by persons in the congregation who could find no fault with his services on their own account.

It will be easily understood that among these many and different elements, is a rather

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trying position for a minister. It is true they all believe themselves to be a congregation easily satisfied and disposed to go to the very extreme of forbearance. 'We don't expect much,' said Miss Euphemia, when during the last vacancy but two, they were lamenting that it was so difficult to obtain a suitable minister. 'Of course we don't look for such a man as Mr. R., or Mr. X. (naming the two ablest ministers we have), the salary we are able to offer being only small. Give us a gentleman, with good average preaching powers; we don't ask for eloquence, though at the same time he ought to have the gift of attracting the people—you have no idea what a field there is among the intelligent brickmakers in this district;—then he certainly ought to be a scholar, one could not think of appointing a half-educated man to a pulpit that had been filled by Dr. M.' 'Well, and we *do* expect,' put in cousin Jane, 'that his wife shall be a lady, because there is a good deal of visiting in our congregation, and we like our minister's wife to take a high standing among us. But give us these few essentials, and no congregation is more easy to please.'

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The only time during which there has been any settled congregational peace since the death of good old Dr. M., was for a period of about six years, while a young minister was with them, who left to take charge of a large congregation in the neighbouring town of Upton. Though twelve years have passed since that time, his removal is still a tender and sore point. 'We did not think,' my cousins often say, 'he would have left us in that ungrateful way, after being with us six years, and we all so much attached to him, too! There was nothing we would not have done for that young man, and yet when those Upton people came, and offered him another hundred a year, he went and accepted it at once. Why, if we had only known, we would have raised it for him in a minute. But that's the way! Ministers may talk, but after all they are just as worldly as other people!' I have, indeed, tried once or twice to suggest that if they were able to raise the salary in order to have kept him, they should have done so without waiting for him to be invited somewhere else; and that a minister might not like to accept an effort made by his congregation merely for their own sake,

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which they had never thought of making for his sake. But it is of no use. Miss Jane Blaise always takes me up with ' Oh, of course, we don't blame him, he had a perfect right to please himself ; but I must say my opinion of ministers was a good deal shaken by it.'

Since that brief period of repose, the people at Wattleton have, indeed, had a poor time of it. For about a year they had a succession of candidates, I think fourteen was the number, and were in consequence split up into three violent factions, each with a favourite candidate. While matters were in this state there happened to come as supply for a Sunday, a Mr. Buncombe, who preached a sermon about liberty, which had the happy effect of uniting the whole congregation in a fervent desire to have him as their minister, under the influence of which the previous expectants were incontinently thrown over, and Mr. Buncombe elected by acclamation. The enthusiasm was brief, however. For a while the chapel was crowded, and Mr. Buncombe was the idol of the people. But by and by an election came, and he was found haranguing the mob in favour of a democratic candidate, whom the respectability of Wattleton-

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in-the-Marshes had seen with aversion brought in to split up their narrow liberal majority, and dire was the wrath of Mr. Drayton, the banker, and of the rest of the leading people. And when a few months afterwards he was discovered to be aiding the brickmakers in a strike, the vials of wrath overflowed, and our denominational organ the following week contained an announcement that 'Mr. Buncombe had resigned the pulpit at Wattleton.'

Of the two ministers who have been there since, there is not much to say. Each of them was chosen after an anxious inspection of all the parsons who could be induced to offer themselves. Both times the ablest candidates were settled somewhere else before the Wattleton people could make up their minds, and in each case a second-rate man was chosen in a hurry at last, with whom no one was satisfied. Young Mr. Saunders, just fresh from college, was inexperienced in the pulpit and awkward in society. His sermons were too cold and philosophical, and 'you know he took no standing whatever in the town.' So, when the year for which he had been invited was over, he was not asked to remain. Their last venture, Mr.

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Fidgett, was a middle-aged man, of great earnestness, but crotchety and impracticable. He alienated the rich people by preaching teetotalism; the teachers disliked him because he wanted to upset all their old plans, and remodel the school on an entirely new principle; with the best intentions and the most amiable feelings, he managed to tread on everyone's corns in turn. At last he received an invitation to go out as missionary to one of the colonies, and fresh in the recollection of all will be the meeting which was held a few months since to present him a testimonial and an affectionate parting address.

So it fell out that when I went to visit my cousins, a month ago, I found them in that transition state known as 'hearing candidates.'

VII.

SOME CANDIDATES FOR A FASTIDIOUS CONGREGATION.

SOME half century ago, the people of one of the outlying parishes in Virginia wrote to Dr. Rice, who was then at the head of a theological seminary, for a minister. They said they wanted a man of first-rate *talents*, for they had run down considerably, and needed building up. They wanted one who could *write* well, for some of the young people were very nice in their literary tastes. They wanted one who could *visit* a good deal, for their former minister had neglected that, and they wanted it more attended to. They wanted a man of very *gentlemanly deportment*, for some thought a great deal of that ; and so they went on describing a perfect minister. The last thing they mentioned was that they gave their minister £80, but if the Doctor would send them just such a man as they had

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described, they would raise another £10, or even make it £100. The Doctor sat right down—for this is a *fact*—and wrote them a reply, telling them they had better make out a call for old Dr. Dwight, in heaven, for he did not know of any one in this world who answered their description; and as Dr. Dwight had been so long living on spiritual food, he might not need so much for the body, and possibly could live on a hundred a year.

No such course, however, was practically open to the congregation at Wattleton. Indeed, much as they revere the memory of Dr. M., whom I mentioned as their ideal minister, whose virtues had been surprisingly brought out during the twenty years since his death, I doubt whether they would have been at all unanimous in inviting him again, or indeed whether that amiable and cautious divine would be at all tempted to return, unless—which I could not for a moment believe—his place in the next world is as much too warm for him as his place in this world was too cool. Being limited, therefore, to more sublunary sources of ministerial supply, the congregation contented them-

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selves with applying to Dr. Y., the principal of Tipton College. One of the friends suggested that Professor X., of Newton Academy, should also be consulted, but the congregation at once and with dignity negated the suggestion. 'You know, cousin,' said Miss Euphemia Blaise, when telling me on my arrival of the steps that had been taken, 'though we are only poor we have a proper self-respect, and that Newton Academy is not a regular college, in fact it is only a sort of back-way into the ministry; and while we think it may do great good among the poor, and even in the way of temporary supplies, we could not look to it for a permanent minister.' 'And besides,' put in cousin Jane, 'those young men do aspire their "h's" so dreadfully, it would be impossible to listen to it as a regular thing.'

Though the application to Tipton College was the only one formally made, informal and tentative communications were opened up in many quarters. My cousins wrote to me about several young ministers in my own neighbourhood, and other members of the congregation consulted their friends; and so at last a very pretty list of names was got

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together of ministers whom it would be desirable to hear. These were then asked to give a Sunday, at their own convenience—of course without the least reference to becoming candidates—simply to supply the pulpit as an act of friendliness and accommodation. This considerably thinned the list, as some ministers declined to accept the invitation because they said it was evident what was meant; and others objected on the opposite ground, that they were not distinctly invited as candidates. I must confess as a layman to sharing the feelings of my cousins, that ministers, as well as congregations, are occasionally hard to please, and that there are no conceivable arrangements for enabling vacant congregations and vacant or removable ministers to become mutually acquainted, which would not be inveighed against by some of my clerical friends as calculated to lower the dignity of the ministry, and repugnant to gentlemanly feeling.

When I got down to Wattleton, to spend my month's holiday from the Bank, two of the candidates had already been heard. Mr. Alford was very well, my cousins seemed to

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think, but his sermon was so very—they did not know what to call it—only he ‘kept telling them such a great deal about their sins.’ Of course it might be tolerated, and forgiven once in a way, as injudicious earnestness; but ‘that kind of preaching, you know,’ said my cousin Jane, ‘is so very discouraging, that we could not think of asking him permanently.’

Ah, good people, thought I, I am afraid you *are* fastidious, after all. Mr. Alford certainly is a little too much inclined to dwell on the darker side of human character, and he holds up the spirit of Christianity with a faithfulness which spares neither his hearers nor himself—you always feel he is preaching at *himself* as well as at others—but he is a man whom any congregation might be proud to have as minister.

‘Well, but how about Mr. Beeton, whom I advised you to ask; you had him over last Sunday, hadn’t you?’

‘Oh, cousin Eutychus,’ said both ladies at once, in a tone of reproach, ‘you *can’t* have seen him lately, or you would never have recommended him to us.’

‘At least I *hope* not.’ Thus, cousin Euphe-

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mia, with a slight pursing up of her mouth. She can be very short sometimes.

‘Why, what in the world is the matter with the man? I don’t know a great deal of him, but I heard him give a capital sermon at the Parsonshire annual assembly, and I know that two or three large town congregations have been talking of him.’

‘Oh, yes, that’s very likely. Your large town congregations are always running after novelties, and will put up with anything for the sake of excitement. We are not so ambitious ; but we *do* like to be respectable ! ’

‘Well, but what *is* it, that you didn’t like?’

‘Why, when we got to chapel and expected to find a decent minister to teach us and improve us, think of our seeing a young man in the pulpit with a great black ugly moustache. Think of listening to such a man.’

It was of no use saying anything, I should only have got myself into difficulties, so I held my peace, and turned the conversation as soon as I could into a different channel.

The following Sunday it was a Mr. Matthew Limmer who was to preach ; one of the senior students from Tipton College. The congregation I found were in a high state of expecta-

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tion, having heard of him as a very gentlemanly young man, and as having no extreme views of any kind, 'not a teetotaller, you know, or one of those philanthropical people who are always making a sensation and talking at public meetings.' So I went to chapel, rather curious to hear him.

I must confess to having been a little disappointed. I think Mr. Limmer must want force of character ; and then there is too much curl and white pocket-handkerchief about him. There was a ring, too, on one of his fingers, which he kept looking at : cousin Jane remarked afterwards what beautiful hands he had, and said it was a sign of good blood, but to me it seemed as if he were too conscious of it. Indeed, he might be said to throw his hands into the service a good deal, while I should have liked to have seen him throw his heart into it rather more. As to the sermon, I must confess that I only heard a part of it, but that I set down to my hereditary failing. What I did hear, however, struck me as thin and flowery ; there was a good deal about the singing of birds, and the shadows of the umbrageous trees, and the still small voice.

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The congregation, however, appeared delighted. Such noddings and confidential whisperings among the younger bonnets in the porch after service! 'Wasn't it beautiful?' 'What a sweet voice!' 'And such spiritual eyes.' 'My dear, did you observe his reading? It reminded me of dear old Dr. M., more than any reading I ever heard,' said old Miss Coulson, with many emphatic nods of her head, to my cousin Euphemia. I am not so sure about the opinion of the men. It seemed, I thought, rather a relief to them to get out, and have a talk about the American war.

But Mr. Limmer was coming home to dine with us, so hospitality must prevent my saying anything more, except that the general impression in our Wattleton circles during the following week was that Mr. Limmer was the coming man.

But they hadn't heard Mr. Delter then.

Who was this Mr. Delter? As the week passed on and the prospects for the following Sunday began to engross the congregational mind, which was already getting rather tired of eulogising Mr. Matthew Limmer's eyes, and voice, and hands, a rumour went about that

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this Mr. Delter was a very extraordinary man. He came from a distant part of England and was personally unknown at Wattleton, and he had lived a quiet secluded life, so that his name had seldom appeared on great public occasions. But Mr. Drayton, the banker, had heard from a friend at a distance about his sermons, and when some one had spoken to him about at once inviting Mr. Limmer, had replied in an oracular way 'no hurry, sir, no hurry; wait till you've heard Mr. Delter, that's all.' And Mr. Drayton being their largest subscriber, and a 'county man,'—I always think the Wattleton people seem rather lifted up by the fact of their being thus connected with 'the county,'—his opinion went for a great deal.

But his opinion went for more still when, on Friday afternoon, little notes were sent round to all the more respectable members of the congregation inviting them to the Grange for Saturday evening, 'to meet the Rev. E. Delter.' This seemed at once to create a favourable impression, and when old Miss Coulson called on my cousins to have a little cabinet council as to 'what they should go in,' and to concoct a plan for

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jointly chartering the fly—Wattleton had only one—from the Crown Hotel, it seemed to me that Mr. Matthew Limmer's prospects were growing very faint indeed.

A very congregational party it was that evening. It was astonishing how many the Draytons had found room for. Everybody seemed to be there. There were the old people in groups about the wide old fireplace, and the young people in knots in the bow window and in the library, which opened off the drawing-room by great folding doors. There was old Mrs. Crook, who had been housekeeper to the late Dr. M., and who lived in a little cottage outside the town, on a very small annuity. Very proud the old lady looked in her much mended black silk dress, and some antique lace of the genuine cream colour, which was understood to have been 'in the family.' There was Mr. Sneezby, the draper, chapel-warden at this present, who seemed distracted between the reserve of one who had pecuniary dealings with most of the company over his counter (which seemed to suggest a respectful bow) and the cordiality of his congregational sympathies (which evidently impelled him

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to a general shaking of hands). There was even one of the master brickmakers there, who had been singled out as the superintendent of the Sunday School, and who was embarrassed by the tea-tray being handed to him, and his being expected to perform the delicate gymnastic exercise of eating and drinking as he stood. But the host and hostess bustled about, with a kind, hospitable smile and word for everyone; and by and by the stiffness wore off, and the people settled down together, and everyone enjoyed it exceedingly.

But about Mr. Delter? On the hearth-rug when we entered (talking to Mr. Drayton) stood a gaunt, lanky man, with light hair, and no white cravat, but only a collar loosely turned down over a black ribbon. He had a shy, awkward look, and I think he was very short-sighted. But, horror of horrors, he had a long straggling beard and—moustache! I expected to see Miss Euphemia faint on the spot, and cousin Jane lift up her voice and testify: or that, at the least, they would show by their manner the high moral disapproval which they had manifested so strongly in the case of Mr. Beeter. But

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circumstances have sometimes a wonderful influence in mollifying the feelings, and when Mr. Drayton came forward to receive my cousins in his most courtly manner, and taking the stranger by the hand, begged to introduce him to 'Miss Blaise and Miss Jane Blaise, two of my most particular friends,' the effect was magical, and they received him with gracious dignity. Mr. Delter was evidently no ladies' man; there was a kind of rugged strength about him, and yet at the same time something of gentleness too, and when he got animated in conversation as the evening wore on, his face lighted up, till its ungainly features had a fine and noble look.

I have my own opinion as to the impression that Mr. Delter would have made if he had fallen upon the unprepared minds of the congregation on the following day; but as it was, his little eccentricities and peculiarities had been let down upon them gently under favourable circumstances, and when Sunday came they were all expectation. And, indeed, there was something very striking in the whole service; not eloquence, but simplicity and earnestness, which made you

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forget the man in his subject, as he seemed to speak right to the heart and conscience. At first there was something of the abruptness and awkwardness which we had noticed the night before ; but gradually as he got hold of his subject, his hesitation passed away, and one's attention became fastened on him, and it became impossible not to listen. There were many things in the sermon that sounded odd and strange, being so different from the ordinary pulpit phraseology and illustration ; but the whole sermon took hold of the mind and left one thinking of it. When the service was over I noticed that very little was said ; there was for once none of that talking over the sermon and the preacher the moment the congregation got out, which is so common and which I had noticed the previous Sunday in the case of Mr. Limmer. Everybody was very friendly, but all seemed thoughtful, and only a few of the heads of the congregation stayed behind to compare notes and exchange opinions.

I never was more struck than on this occasion with the fact that even the most fastidious people are open to true and deep impressions, the moment religion is preached to them in

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a very earnest and simple way. Here was a man with half a dozen peculiarities which would have repelled ordinary people, and yet they ceased to be noticed because he appeared to be really absorbed by the great thoughts of religion, and to long to reach the souls of his hearers. It was a sermon which seemed to make us all feel humbled, and yet there was nothing morbid or depressing in it ; and, while holding up very high ideas of religion and of duty, it was spoken in a brave helpful tone which had an encouraging and invigorating effect upon the soul. I do think our preachers have it more in their own power to do a good work than they are generally aware of. For, at the bottom of all the fastidiousness and conventionality of which they complain as hindering their influence—even in those who seem most worldly and least open to religious impressions—there is a spiritual nature, with wants and longings deeper, perhaps, than ever find their way into words, ready to give a hearty response to anyone who will break through the superficial crust of reserve, and speak, not in timid propriety to the critical mind, but with earnest conviction to the living soul beneath.

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They heard several other candidates at Wattleton; some more eloquent, and many more 'proper,' according to all accepted canons of judgment among respectable congregations, but the best of them seemed flat and insipid; and, according to the latest accounts I have received, Wattleton is likely soon to present the interesting spectacle of a fastidious congregation flying in the face of all its own most cherished prejudices, by extending a cordial and unanimous invitation to Mr. Delter.

VIII.

OVERMUCH DISCOURSE.

Now, my Brother Joe, he approves of long sermons. He is a minister,—I think I have not mentioned him before,—and in our family we all consider him a remarkably able preacher. It was he who preached that magnificent sermon on the Quartodeciman Controversy before the Parsonshire Autumnal Convention last year. It was described in our denominational organs at the time as having, it was hoped, finally disposed of that interesting historical question, and as being replete with erudition. So it was; but it lasted an hour and a quarter, and I know the secret heart-burnings which it caused among the brethren assembled on that important occasion, who had some unusually interesting business to transact afterwards, previous to the slight refection with which those assemblies conclude. I

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spoke to Joe about this afterwards, but it was of no use. He says he will not, for his part, give in to the emasculated taste of the present day. He holds that no man can take up a subject and work it through properly in less than an hour. And, indeed, I dare say he is right ; only the difficulty is to convince a congregation of the paramount necessity of a subject being ' worked through.' He was preaching our charity sermons only last Sunday week, our teachers having asked him, out of regard for me. It certainly was a discourse of great power, and showed immense research. It went thoroughly into the subject of education, bringing before us the opinions and practices of ancient nations, examining the questions of secular and religious education and the duty of the state to educate the people, and ending with a powerful appeal to Christian parents. I was proud of Joe ; and yet I could not but feel that if he had left out the first forty minutes, and given us only the last twenty-five, his sermon would have done more good. There was old Mrs. Baker fidgetting about in her pew, and turning round continually to look at the clock ; I knew well enough

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that she was thinking of the pudding which she had put on the fire, in faith, before she left home ; and that her mind was revolving the various contingencies which might justify her in rushing out before service was over. And there was Mr. Biffin, unable to sleep longer than his customary half-hour, pulling out his watch every few minutes, in the pew behind me, and blowing his nose, as none but irritated old gentlemen can ; all because he had heard his carriage drive up, and knew that the horses were catching cold. And afterwards did not half the congregation look at me reproachfully, as if it were I who had been preaching too long ? I can't justify this. I feel it is as my brother says, that people are become degenerate ; but the fact being so, I couldn't help suggesting to Joe whether it were not better for our religious exercises to be modified accordingly.

Certainly people must have had strong stomachs for divinity in the good old times. Among the Puritans no man would have been reckoned worthy to be a preacher who had attempted to preach less than an hour and a half or two hours. Often they exceeded this, Good Oliver Heywood speaks

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incidentally of a private exercise at the house of Mr. Angier, of Denton, where he *began* the service, 'continuing about three hours pouring out my soul before the Lord, principally on behalf of his church.' This was only the beginning; what must the full service have been?

What a change from those times to the latter part of last century, when a country squire would let it be known that he should never ask the parson to dinner if his sermon went over twenty minutes! I think that is unreasonably short; and yet I do not know whether even in so brief a space as twenty minutes, a man who would speak to the point might not put something which would produce quite as strong and lasting an impression as if he took a much longer time about it. But somehow—I speak it with all respect; I fancy that as a layman it is dangerous ground for me,—a minister never can find in his heart to leave out anything he has written. He has penned a discourse, say, which he knows will take him fifty minutes to read, and he knows in his heart 'twere better an 'twere shorter. But what shall he leave out? He cannot leave

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out his arguments, for they are all necessary to each other, and no one of them but is essential to a complete view. Then he reads over his illustrations; but they are the pet part of the discourse. What, cross out that eloquent passage about woods and birds and waving corn? or that touching appeal to the experience of the young parent? layman as I am, I can understand how the preacher loves such passages, like the apple of his eye, and cannot bring himself to such slaughter of the innocents. And yet there is nothing else left to curtail except the practical application, and it would be cowardly to lessen the force or comprehensiveness of that. No, there seems no portion that can be spared. And yet dear young preacher, who art sitting in thy study pondering this dilemma, do not deceive yourself; it were better to cut out the most beautiful sentence that ever delighted your heart, and sounded pleasantly as you read it over complacently to yourself, than to exceed the canonical length and to provoke the wonder 'when will it be done?' If I might suggest, I would say, 'Leave out as many of the arguments as you please. Probably nine men

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out of ten would not be able to follow them, and the tenth man knew them all before ever you thought them out.' One of the greatest errors a preacher can commit is to treat his congregation as reasonable beings, —of course I only mean in the sense of being able to follow out a nice line of logical argument. Let him take up a plain principle or a thought that will carry conviction with it, and illustrate that and drive it well home, but let him spare his logic. And of illustrations, leave *in* the simplest. Don't omit the waving corn or the mother ; but if you have lugged in Shakespeare or Pythagoras, or have fetched some neat and erudite references from profane history, cut them ruthlessly out ! On most of your hearers they would be lost, except perchance by some such happy misunderstanding as that which sent away some working men delighted with a learned lecture on Cerinthus and the Gnostics, saying exultingly, ' Eh, but yon's a reet un, didn't he pitch into them knobsticks.'

But in long discourses there are various degrees of unbearableness. There are two kinds which are especially abhorrent to all right-minded congregations. The first of

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these is the sermon which continually holds out false expectations of coming to an end. You are told at the outset that the subject is to be considered under seven heads, and you exhort your soul to patience, and count the heads, not without satisfaction. But lo! when the preacher has worked through 'seventhly,' he begins another long division with the ominous announcement 'there is one thing which I wish to impress.' Then comes 'and now to conclude,' and when this conclusion is fairly worked out, you are again put off with 'a few words and I have done.' Now I must protest that this is unfair dealing, and it is apt to leave upon the mind a consciousness of having been 'done.' Give us as many heads as you please, only let us have some assurance that when they are cut off they are finished and done with, and that others will not re-appear, phoenix-like, from the ashes of those already consumed.

The other kind which I wish to notice, is an excess that arises rather from a certain mental laxity, than, as in the previous case, from moral defects. Some preachers prepare a good and ample discourse, one which, should they give it as prepared would hold the

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mind unchained for its moderate duration, and leave behind that most desirable longing for a little more. But, behold, the preacher every now and then leaves what he has prepared, and goes off at a tangent into subsidiary disquisitions of uncertain length. Now this is tantalising. By all means let preachers speak instead of reading; or if they like, prepare a little, and leave room for following the free play of thought as the mind warms to its work. But what I object to is such wanderings when the beaten prepared track is long enough already. How often have I listened to such preachers, and wondered when they would get back to the right road again; and been oppressed by the knowledge that they will omit nothing of *that*, whatever else they may add in.

Deal gently with us, oh ye men of long discourse. Remember that you have us utterly in your power as we sit under you, and use your power tenderly and moderately, dealing out milk for babes and that in modest portions; or if perchance a little strong meat sometimes, then cutting it up very small to suit delicate digestions not able to take much at once.

IX.

A SHOCKING CASE OF ABDUCTION.

THEY are in a sad way about their parson down at Screwby. I met old John Ormrod last week—he generally walks in on market days, from the old habit of it, though he's given up both the mill and the shop years ago—and he began at once, 'Now, Maister Eutychus, I'm boun' to tell yo' a bit o' my mind. We're nobbut a lot of poor folk at Screwby, but still we have our feelin's, and we think yo've all acted very mean to go and tak' our parson away from us.'

But perhaps it would be better if I were to put the intelligent reader in possession of the facts of the case. Screwby is a little town about eight miles from our city, where we have a rather flourishing congregation, mostly of plain country folk and working people. I always like to go to Screwby at their charity sermons, for they are a very

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hearty people, with less stiffness among them than in many of our town congregations. How they do sing to be sure ;—good, old-fashioned tunes, with ‘a bit of repeat’ in them, and six or eight musicians fiddling away with the severe gravity characteristic of men occupying a responsible position, and feeling that forty generations are looking down upon them from the gallery. Well, to Screwby, some four years ago, came a new minister, a young man of great promise. The people had been rather in an unsettled state for some years, but now they became thoroughly united, and the praises of Mr. Duke were in all the churches round. It was certainly quite delightful to hear them talk of ‘our parson’ ; the congregation increased, and the school was crowded, and what with meetings for young men, and meetings for young women, and mutual improvement societies, and classes for grammar and astronomy, and I don’t know what beside,—certainly things were going on very well indeed. But there was one hitch. The people at Screwby could sing, and they could teach ; and as for hospitality, why the minister might have lived at their houses

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if he had liked ; but when it came to giving money, their hearts failed them !

Now, Mr. Duke, with that singular fatality which often attends young ministers, had got married very soon after he left Newton Academy. A sweet, gentle creature his young wife was, and very pleased were the people when he took her home, and she took her part among them all so freely, especially making friends, and doing a great deal of good among the young women in the stocking factories. But by-and-by a baby came, and now they have two, and for the last two years poor Mr. Duke has found it hard work to carry on upon the hundred a year, which when he first went seemed a rather luxurious income. But the Screwby people never dreamed of increasing it. It is not that they are poor. They pass indeed for poor people, and live in a plain homely way, but there are some of them well known in the neighbourhood to be men of substantial property. Old John Ormrod, now ; he walks in eight miles to market and eight miles back, in an old grey coat and corduroy breeches, with a basket on his arm ; and he lives in the kitchen, except on grand occasions, when the parlour

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is opened and displays a dazzling sight of mahogany furniture, with antimacassars on everything from the sofa to the coal box ; but the house is a good square stone house, and it belongs to John, and so does the mill that he has let to the co-operatives, and the shop which he has given up to his daughter and her husband, and all that long row of cottages at goit-foot belongs to him ; and it is said that he has a deal of money out on mortgage, but John has always been very close about those things, so that no one can tell. But, however, John is not a poor man ; and there are two or three more of the same sort who smoke their pipes together now and then, and grumble about the income-tax most suspiciously, and who are well known to have 'scraped a tidy bit of money together.' And very much interested they all are in chapel matters. John can start a hymn at the meetings with any of them, and old Isaac Bottomley has preached at a pinch ; and Joshua Bramble, 'oud Joss,' as he is called by every man, woman, and child in Screwby, has been one of their best Sunday School teachers for forty years back. But their hearts fail them when it comes to

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giving. The sittings are a shilling or eighteen pence a quarter ; then they have a subscription in order to raise the minister's salary, there being only some twenty or thirty pounds endowment, and to this subscription John and Isaac and 'oud Joss' subscribe their two pounds apiece, and they do not do even this without a good deal of grumbling when any little extra subscription has to be made up. So poor Mr. Duke struggled on as well as he could, for he was rather a sensitive man and did not like to face the discontent which he well knew would arise if he asked them to raise anything more for him.

Well ; a month or two ago, the chapel at Blackport became vacant, and as it happens that I am one of the trustees, I named Mr. Duke to the people as a likely man for a busy and increasing town ; and after various hearings and negotiations, in the course of which it came out that I was the prime mover in the matter, he was chosen at Blackport, with a salary half as large again as he had had at Screwby.

It must not, however, be imagined that the Screwby people bore the change with equanimity. They were sincerely attached

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to their minister, and moreover, they were proud of him, and grievous was the outcry at what they considered a sort of felonious enticing away. In fact, they did everything they could, entreated, remonstrated—everything, *except* resolve to subscribe sufficient to make Mr. Duke's position comfortable; and even if they had done this now, it is doubtful if he would have remained, as the field opened at Blackport was one really better suited to his powers.

So it came to pass that the first time old John Ormrod met me in the market place he came up, and instead of a cordial shake of the hand, stumped down his thick stick upon the flags and said, 'Now, Maister Eutychus, we think yo've acted very mean to go and tak' away our parson!'

'Well, John,' I said, 'What's to do? I suppose Mr. Duke was free to please himself. We didn't *make* him leave you.'

'No, but you went an' 'ticed him, an' I don't reckon it wur right to throw temptation in a young man's way, an' him gettin' on so well, an' so comfortable-like amang us.'

'Temptation! Come, Mr. Ormrod, that's all nonsense. Why, now, look here; if your

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Sam, who's manager at Cutts', is offered a much better place somewhere else, wouldn't you have him go?'

'Well, happen I would; but we looken for a preacher to be better nor common folk, and to think about doin' good.'

'Very well, then you ought to do better by him. If you thought it would be wrong for him to consider the money, you ought to have considered it for him. You knew he must have hard work to make both ends meet, and you ought to have laid your heads together and made up something more for him, without waiting for him to be invited somewhere else. And as to our "enticing" him, what would you have had us do? How is a minister ever to change unless either somebody asks him, or he offers himself: and I expect you would have thought it still worse if he had done that!'

'But he wur doin' so much good at Screwby, we think he might have sacrificed something to stop with us.'

'Well, then, you should have been willing to sacrifice something to keep him. If he was to stop with you, he would have had to sacrifice £50 a year, to say nothing of its

‘WANTED IMMEDIATELY’

being a larger town and a more important position. Now do you think it reasonable that all the sacrifice should be on his side? I think you all ought to have shared it, and not to have waited till you were forced, but to have done it as soon as ever you saw that he was doing his best among you, and that he really needed something more to keep him comfortably.’

I saw old John was a little shaken by what I said, but I did not press him to say he had altered his opinion, for they are a very stiff sort, those Screwby folk, and I knew well enough he would never own to being in the wrong. But I could not help thinking, as I went on my way, that after all, we laymen are apt to give our parsons rather hard measure; for we are so ready with our charges of worldliness, that it is difficult for a minister to ‘ask for more,’ and yet we seldom think of giving it to him unless he does. And behold, when I got home the first thing that struck me was the following advertisement in a weekly paper:—

‘Wanted, immediately, a single man, a member of the ——— denomination, to supply a small congregation in a village, principally on the Lord’s-day. A small salary would be given. If acquainted with the general shoe-making business, an opportunity now presents itself where a constant situation as a journeyman can be secured.’

X.

UNSOCIAL WORSHIP.

As a general rule, I think a man ought to hold with his minister ; but there are occasions on which it becomes necessary to form an individual opinion and to express it. I don't know how it is, but I think some ministers are so desperately spiritual that they cannot see common sense about what may be best for common ordinary people, and so they often, without intending it, strain after such very lofty religious effects as, when attained, are only artificial, and do harm rather than good. Now, there was our parson, last Sunday week, preaching that people ought to be so intensely impressed by the religious spirit when they come to chapel, that it should quite absorb all their thoughts, and that when the service is over they should all go silently home. He especially condemned in rather bitter words—

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for he never half says a thing—all stopping to converse in the chapel porch, as showing a frivolous and irreverent spirit. This was coming pretty close home, for, to say the truth, our people at B—— are rather given to lingering about after service. On fine Sundays there is quite a busy scene. Some few of the great people walk soberly down to the gates, but I am inclined to think it is more from stateliness than religious feeling. All the younger people, however, and the Sunday School teachers, and those kind, busy, 'elect' ladies, who are so useful in the congregation, get together, and there is much shaking of hands and general interchange of friendly communications. But on that Sunday everybody seemed as if they wished to stop and speak as usual, but did not like to begin; a few exchanged whispers, and when two or three did get together in a corner, as usual, up came Mrs. Charles Spokes, who generally makes up for the forced silence of service time by gossiping for half a dozen afterwards, and said with a laugh, 'Now, remember what Mr. —— said, and don't talk; you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, you giddy young things,' from which I

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gathered that she had not herself been so seriously impressed as our parson would have desired.

Now, I for one cannot agree with Mr. — about this. I go with all he says about giving your whole mind to the service. I don't at all approve of the custom which prevails at one country chapel I know of, where all the gentlemen, having sent in their wives and families, get together in a corner before service and talk politics and trade, with a dash of the scandal of the neighbourhood, and do not go in till the opening hymn has come to the last verse. Nor would I palliate inattention during the hour of worship. I hate to see those Miss Sparrows in the pew before me, fidgetting about, looking everywhere except at the pulpit, settling and re-settling their fine new bonnets, and manifestly not thinking at all of what is going on. I can allow for an occasional nap, for I know that very good people are liable to that weakness of the flesh, indeed I am constitutionally so myself ; but deliberate inattention is inexcusable. When service is over, however, I think it is altogether different. After sitting confined

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in our pews for an hour and a half, right among people whom we know, but with whom we have interchanged not a word nor a sign, it is quite unnatural to go away without a few friendly greetings. And of course if we speak at all, we cannot refrain from making some novel and interesting allusion to the weather, and that is equally sure to lead to a little friendly conversation. I think this gives in some measure the element of sociality that our worship wants. The separate system, the worshipping in private boxes and reserved seats, destroys the feeling of sociality. You might sit next pew but one to a man for two years, till you knew every curl in the back of his head, and yet never speak to him, and be total strangers when you met, were it not for the opportunity which presents itself as you are going out, and when you feel naturally disposed for friendly greetings. This restores the balance, and you go home after five minutes so spent feeling that you have been meeting with friends, and with that wholesome glow of genial neighbourliness at your heart which, to my mind, is especially in harmony with the spirit of worship. For instead of this

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being at variance with the natural religious spirit, and calculated to dissipate any impression which may have been made upon the mind by the sermon, the hymns, or the prayers, I think it is quite the contrary. I know there are times when a death or some especially moving subject has given an unusually solemn and impressive tone to the service, when we feel quite disinclined to talk, and only give each other quiet greetings or that silent grasp of the hand which speaks more than any words. But usually, when our worship has been of a wholesome, joyous, encouraging kind, as I think it mostly ought to be—I don't like your preachers who are always morbid and depressing—we naturally begin talking together afterwards, not because the impressions of the time have passed from our minds, but because those very impressions include an element of mutual friendliness and neighbourly feeling, that prompts us to speak to one another. The poor feel this even more than the rich. I am sure little Biggs, the grocer, going home with his family to the small close parlour behind his shop, is happier all the week for a friendly shake of the hand, and a few words

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from one or another of our well-to-do people. Looking at it from a high spiritual point of view, you may say it ought not to be so, and that Mr. Biggs ought to go silently and thoughtfully home ; but I think the worship does him all the more good, and is all the more liked by him because associated with a little intercourse of a more genial and less limited kind than he gets over the counter or among his own neighbours.

And new-comers and strangers especially feel this. When I go to a congregation in a strange town, I always feel as if I should like to be spoken to, as if somehow it was not a natural thing to have gone in and worshipped with a number of people of my own faith, and to go away again without a word of greeting. So when I see a stranger in our chapel, I always feel a desire to speak to him, and to tell him how glad we are when any come among us ; and if I find he is one of our people from some distant town, I feel an almost irresistible impulse to ask him to dinner. I do not say that I always obey this impulse. Family men know that little domestic difficulties are apt to arise from the too frequent extension of such extempore

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hospitalities. Mrs. Eutychus does not like strangers on a Sunday. But if I reluctantly obey the affectionate conjugal admonition which is conveyed by a slight pull at my coat, or a tender pinch of the arm, my feelings are nevertheless unchanged.

Therefore I hold for a fair amount of conversation after chapel. Only let my plea be justified by its being general, and not mere gossiping in little cliques. Speak not merely to your personal friends; speak also to the poor and to strangers. If you see a man coming Sunday after Sunday whom nobody seems to know, speak to him and bid him welcome; depend upon it he will be more likely to come again, and will feel more interest in the worship than he did before.

XI.

‘PARSONIC ACID.’

AND what is ‘Parsonic Acid,’ I dare say some readers, as yet only acquainted with the rudiments of chemistry, may ask.

Was it in a dream, or did I really read in an old book the other day, this definition of it? Anyhow, it will serve my turn. ‘Parsonic acid is a certain pungent kind of talk, which is usually emitted where parsons do much congregate together.’

How I came to know anything about it happened thus.

A few weeks ago I got a characteristic little note from my cousins at Wattleton-in-the-Marshes. As the reader is already acquainted with those two excellent relatives of mine, I trust I shall not be betraying confidence in transcribing their letter. It ran thus:—

‘Dear Cousin Eutyclus.—I suppose you

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have heard that Mr. Delter, whom you saw when you were here last summer, accepted the unanimous invitation which was given to him, and has settled as our minister. He has been with us now about four months, and we are all very much delighted with him. You cannot think what nice sermons he gives us, so full of eloquence, pathos, and also of *intellect*; in fact, we have had no one *at all equal* to him since poor old Dr. M. We had the Sewing Meeting last week, and everybody was talking about him. Indeed some of the young ladies are quite ridiculous in their enthusiasm, and sister Euphemia quite offended one of the Miss Draytons, who was talking about working him some markers for the pulpit Bible, by telling her she ‘had much better hem him a set of shaving cloths!’ But Euphemia is very sharp sometimes you know, and though we admire Mr. Delter very much, we do think it is a pity he should disfigure his face as he does. We hope dear Chloe and the children are all well, and with our united love, I remain your affectionate cousin,—JANE BLAISE.’

‘ P.S.—I declare if I had not almost for-

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gotten to tell you that the special object of my writing is to ask you to come down for a few days next week. It is the ministers’ meeting here, and, as Mr. Delter’s lodgings are very confined, and the Draytons are away at the Exhibition, we have asked Mr. Delter to invite the ministers to dine at our house, and spend the afternoon together, according to their usual custom. Now we feel a delicacy about this, some of them being *single gentlemen*, and we are, therefore, wishful that you should come and act as host for us. The ministers’ meeting is on Wednesday, and on the Thursday there is service at the chapel and a public collation at the Crown.’

This was the letter, and of course Mrs. Eutychus and I had a little consultation as to whether I should go. I am sorry to say that dear Chloe did not encourage my going as much as I expected, saying that I was always going gadding about after parsons, and might almost as well be a parson myself. Of course this was her joke; but however I thought I should be better for a few days’ outing, as it had been balancing time at the Bank, and I had been rather over-

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worked. So at last I wrote to tell my cousins I would come, and on the following Tuesday night, after business hours, I went down by the express, reaching Wattleton about midnight.

My cousins were too busy the next morning to devote much time to me, for it was indeed rather an anxious occasion for them. They had never entertained a party of ministers before; but on various occasions several of the ministers who were coming had stayed at their house, and they told me, during breakfast, little anecdotes of the 'fads' and queer ways of some of them, especially of some of an ascetic and self-mortifying turn, whom they said they always found it most difficult to please. However all things have an end and so had their labours, and by three o'clock Mr. Delter had arrived to receive his friends, and the Misses Blaise were waiting to welcome them, with the terrible calmness of women who having done their best were now obliged to leave results to Providence and a not-altogether-reliable cook.

I am not quite sure whether the ministers liked this vicarious hospitality on the part

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of Mr. Delter. It seemed to me as if there were a little constraint upon them, especially while we were all waiting for dinner, which had to be put back a little on account of Mr. Orton, the minister of the Great Meeting, Docksley, who had never been known to be in time in his life. One or two of the younger men indeed, fresh from college, attempted a few jokes, but they fell very flat, and the only animation was on the part of the Rev. Peter Drinkwater, a gentleman with a mission, who was improving the opportunity by trying to interest the Misses Blaise in a movement for supplying the poor of a neighbouring town with cheap baby-linen, about which he had recently published a pamphlet.

At last, however, old Mr. Orton arrived, and was proceeding to give a detailed account of the singular circumstances which had detained him, holding Miss Euphemia's hand all the while in an absent way, and shaking it from time to time to give emphasis to his narrative, when, to our great relief, dinner was announced.

I am not going to describe the dinner. I will only say that under its genial influence

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the hearts of the brethren seemed to open, and the previous constraint passed away. And no sooner was this the case, than the conversation began to take that peculiar character which suggested to me the subject of this paper. Somebody started the question of the Bi-centenary, and straightway all were engaged in elucidating the secret history of the failure of the great movement which had been attempted for commemorating the event at X. One told of the real reasons which had caused Mr. Fiddle and the Rev. Mr. Faddle to break off from the movement, and the conduct of those two well-known gentlemen was warmly debated, till Mr. Drinkwater made a digression by repeating an authentic version of the conversation, in which Mr. Floater, the great city merchant, who had been expected to head the movement with a rattling subscription of at least a thousand pounds, had declined to give anything, and great horror was expressed by most of the ministers present at this atrocious obduracy on the part of Floater. This naturally led to a conversation on local difficulties of the same kind, and various heart-rending instances of the insensibility of the

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laity to the most noble opportunities of ‘ coming out ’ were related. Indeed, as I listened, I could not but feel almost ashamed of belonging to a class which seemed, according to these accounts, so conspicuously to have failed in its duty, and it was rather a relief to me when a little nucleus of confidential chat at the other end of the table enlarged into a general conversation on the proceedings of a neighbouring minister who had recently been making himself, though in a very harmless way, rather ridiculous. And indeed if the brethren were not very sparing of the laity, certainly they were not much more tender to one another. Several racy anecdotes were related of the foibles and extravagances of well-known ministers. Mr. A.’s pride, Mr. B.’s awkwardness, the intolerable lengths to which Mr. C. carries his habit of smoking, Dr. D.’s latest grandiloquism, and the shameful badness of Mr. E.’s hat, were all in turn illustrated in a graphic and pleasing style. I thought my cousins looked rather shocked at all this, but they took it in very good part, thinking that the ministers were deferring till the dinner was removed, and they should have

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retired, the serious business for which, in the innocence of their hearts, they believed these meetings were held. Accordingly, they did not protract their stay, and withdrew with a graceful observation on the part of Cousin Euphemia, that she and her sister would no longer hinder the important business which she was sure they must have on hand.

As a veracious historian, however, without wishing to betray any confidence that accrued to me as a simple layman who had temporarily fallen among parsons, I am bound to say that the chief difference which manifested itself after my cousins’ withdrawal was a freer tone of mutual criticism and general comment, and a much more hearty devotion to the dessert, for which, while the ladies were at table, a general indifference had been shown, as of minds quite superior to such unconsidered trifles. This latter is indeed by no means a peculiarity of the cloth; I have frequently noticed how laymen also, eminent and otherwise, who have passed by all the sweet things at first, as if they really could not bring their minds down to them, have, by-and-by, when left to themselves, taken to them in an absent sort of way,

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that has gradually led to surprising results. But I am chiefly concerned with the feast of reason, which I think on the whole did not improve in its character. There was, indeed, an endeavour on the part of one or two to transact a little business in which the common action of the ministers of the district was involved, but they were voted bores, and only drew down upon themselves the more unsparing witticisms of the rest. And, though I am an elderly man myself, truth obliges me to record that the older ministers were the worst ; they were the most utterly incorrigible jesters ; they told the most mischievous stories ; they seemed most like schoolboys let out of school. I was so well known to most of them that they did not look on me as an intruder, and I sat by listening, amused, and interested, if not much instructed. I confess that until that day I had no idea that ministers were so fond of gossip, though, truth to say, it was not ill-natured gossip. Nothing was spared that had any connection with ecclesiastical affairs. Mr. F.’s articles in the ‘ Rational ’ ; the split in the congregation at Scrimmageham ; the eminent services rendered by Common-tator’s

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Letters in the ‘ Weekly Churchman,’ were all canvassed with great candour. The actual facts about Mr. G.’s invitation to H——; why Mr. I, was coming home from the colonies, and the true character of his rather vague successes there; the patriotic struggles in the churches of our sister country; all the most recent ministerial changes; the latest quotations in what may be called ministerial prices; all in turn came under notice, and some impressive utterances were given on the subject of the movement for increasing salaries—the great question of the day. Thus the afternoon passed pleasantly away till tea was announced, after which the guests present dispersed to the houses of members of the congregation with whom they were going to stay, to meet again for the graver engagements of the morrow.

‘ Now, my dear Euphemia,’ I said, as I sat late that evening with my cousins, who had been inveighing rather warmly against what they called the light and frivolous character of the meeting, and who had been evidently shocked by the bursts of laughter which they had heard proceeding from the dining-room during the afternoon—‘ now,

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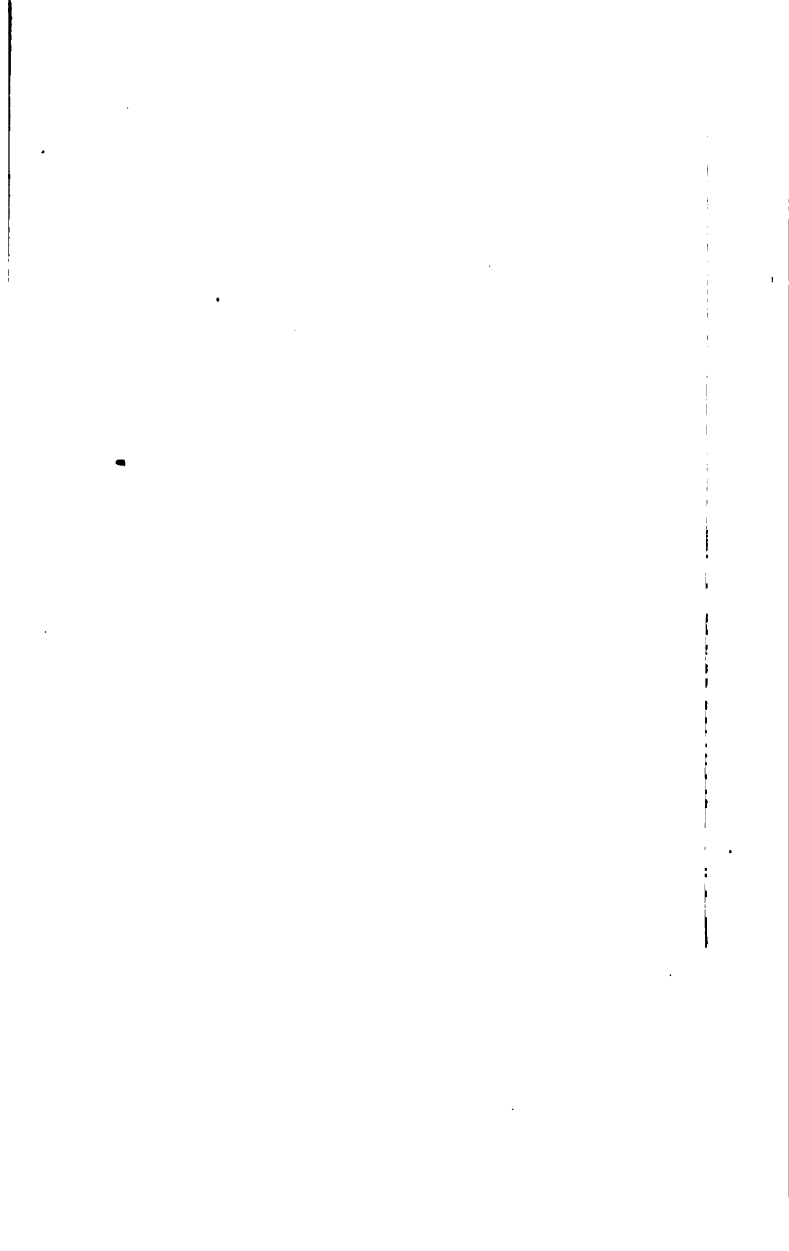
my dear Euphemia, let us be just. These men are not really either light or frivolous. All this is but the natural unbending of lives which are for the most part busy and earnest, and filled with zealous and self-denying labours. You know how devoted old Mr. Orton was last winter when the cholera was at Docksley; and Mr. Drinkwater is quite wearing himself out by his labours amongst the poor; and they were among the wildest this afternoon. I felt as you do for a little while; but then I remembered your father’s anecdote of old Dr. M., whom you were all so fond of.’

‘What was that?’

‘Why, a prim young Evangelical was rather shocked at him one day for what he thought unbecoming levity, and said with great surprise—“Sir, are you a serious Christian?” “No,” was Dr. M.’s prompt reply, “No, sir, I am a jocose one.”’

‘Well,’ said my cousin, ‘there’s a good deal in that, but really I did *not* think ministers were so fond of gossip.’

THE END.





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